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You know Mary Timony as the former frontwoman of Helium. We know Mary as the bewitching guitar goddess behind *Ex Hex*. Her latest solo effort is all ethereal rock, spooky vibes, and just a sprinkling of fairy dust.

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VICE RECORDS



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HOMETAPES



THE CLOUD ROOM
The Cloud Room

"[Hey Now Now] is a song that is destined to be the summer hit that is on everyone's iPod top 25 played lists. Expect big things from The Cloud Room in the next year." -The Tripwire

GIGANTIC MUSIC



MAGNETA LANE
The Constant Lover

This trio of Toronto girly-punk are the current darlings of the music blogiverse and are gearing up to invade the USA. Vintage Kinks, Sonic Youth, VU, & Nancy Sinatra are influences but remagnetized in a wholly fresh and unique fashion. "*The Constant Lover* is an impressive, memorable debut..." - Pitchfork

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Above (center), and throughout this issue: "Sigil Logos" from the series *Out of Context* (2003-2004) by Sam Ott.

"I took sigil magic(k) and applied it to corporate logos, sort of combining the Billboard Liberation approach with the Austin Osman Spare/Genesis P-Orridge approach, in order to examine how deeply ingrained logos are to our everyday mental landscape—how convenient product recognition has become an uncontrollable urge."

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On the cover: M.I.A. photograph by W. T. Nelson

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FREEDOM NOW MAYBE

The New Secession

By Peter Lamborn Wilson

LAST NOVEMBER, right after the election, I attended an odd event in Middlebury, Vermont—a two-day conference devoted to the question of whether Vermont should consider seceding from the USA and declaring itself the “Second Vermont Republic.”

The first Vermont Republic lasted from 1777 to 1791, during which time it recognized neither England nor the USA as sovereign. Thanks to Ethan Allen and the Green Mountain Rangers the state has an old and still lively sense of itself as unique and independent-minded, if not downright cranky.

The keynote speeches delivered at Middlebury by SVR founder Thomas Naylor and activist/historian Kirkpatrick Sale made it clear that any Vermont independence movement would be radical, Green, populist, non-violent and typically “Vermont-socialist.” (The Bread & Puppet Theater is already interested.) SVR’s underlying philosophy is derived

from the “small is beautiful” school of Leopold Kohr (his *Breakdown of Nations* is the bible), “Buddhist economist” E. F. Schumacher, the UK-based Fourth World Movement, and ultimately from the minarchism of Thoreau and the American tradition of “unterrified Jeffersonians,” extreme democrats and even anarchists.

All this may be considered odd enough. But what really struck me as strange was the mood of the conference. Everyone there was cheerful, optimistic and pugnacious. Everywhere else in America that weekend leftists, liberals and libertarians were plunged in gloom. But in Middlebury the triumph of Bushite pre-millennialist idiocy was taken as a sign that the US Empire is about to disintegrate. The conference

voted unanimously to support the aims of the Second Vermont Republic. Delegates stomped and cheered. One woman, whose son was in Iraq with the National Guard, proclaimed herself ready to die for this new cause if necessary. Suddenly it felt kind of like 1968 again. Were all these people crazy?

Four more years.

You know what I’m talking about already but let me spell it out.

Imagine:

Four more years of neo-con Jihadist slope-browed pseudo-Zionist McImperialism; four more years of stomping on Iraq and Afghanistan and possibly Iran, Syria and North Korea; of deficit spending and debt both national and individual; of

ludicrous Red/Blue culture war; of inflation and unemployment; erosion of civil liberties; no tree left behind; more tax breaks for the rich and the corporations; blah blah blah. To top it off, “JEB IN ’08!”—and another four more years.

Some of my friends are moving to Canada, where they can join grayhaired draft-dodgers of the Vietnam era and suffer the bitterness of exile along with the compensations of socialized health care and quasi-legal pot. No one dares to dream of staying on and overthrowing the Empire. Not even us grayhaired really believe in The Revolution anymore. But the piffle of tepid reformism (the “left wing” of Skull’n’Bones, so to speak) makes many of us reel with nausea and depression, or anyway terminal boredom. What’s to be done?

Barely anything remains of the alternative economy and society of the ‘60s and ‘70s. Most of the food

(continued on page 9)



The Sasquatch Militia: protectors of the Republic of Cascadia, situated from 42° to 60° north latitude on the North American coast..

Hotel & Farm by Ben Katchor



LETTERS OF COMMENT

So, How Was It For You?

Spent a great hour last night reading the March issue and just want you to know I'm in a better mood for it. C&D are hilarious; Michael Brownstein's article "Killing the Madman" is going in my scrapbook; Brendan Benson made me re-think music, and once when I was in Chicago I was blown away by an exhibition by outsider Henry Darger, so Trinie Dalton's interview with Jessica Yu was an unexpected extravagance.

Scratch Records in Vancouver also had the January issue; I'm just getting into that one. The article on mushrooms was edifying. Each issue takes me away to a groovy den with a red lamp, candles, textured wallpaper and silk cushions, psychedelic music and gurus speaking quietly. You rock, in other words.

Thank you!

Nancy Lanthier
Via email

Name That Robber Baron

Regarding Ian Svenonius's article "A Conversation With the Secret Service" (March 2005): *How to Win Friends and Influence People* is by Dale Carnegie, not Nelson Rockefeller. It's actually a pretty good book.

Best,

Wendy Hermanson Geller
Via email

Please send correspondence to editor@arthurmag.com or Arthur Editorial Lodge, 3408 Appleton Street, Los Angeles, CA 90039. Arthur reserves the right to edit letters of comment for clarity, of course. (Believe us, you wouldn't want it otherwise.) You can also comment at length at the message board at www.arthurmag.com



A CORRECTION

Due to a production error, the introduction to last issue's interview with Ben Chasny of Six Organs of Admittance was printed incorrectly. We apologize to Mr. Chasny and to our readers. Here is the text as it should have read:

Last summer Ben Chasny told me about his plans for the next record he would be making under his Six Organs of Admittance moniker. The upcoming album would be a turning point for him: it'd be the first Six Organs recordings done in a studio and his first album for his new label (Chicago indie perennial Drag City), sure, but he also wanted the record to be a creative step forward.

"I told them I want to go in there and have some folk stuff, but I also want to attempt something more freaked-out and free," he said.

School of the Flower, recorded during those August 2004 sessions with drummer Chris Corsano and released last month, is more freaked out and free than previous Six Organs albums. It's a front-to-end lovely, beguiling work that alternates simple, emotionally reassuring campfire folk songs with expansive, occasionally ominous instrumental tracks: long, quickly fingerpicked acoustic guitar lines repeat and interlink into infinity, electric guitars toll and squall, drums skitter and bubble underneath. The record is like an owl—it sees and knows all, but is willing to communicate to others only some of what it knows. We are lucky—privileged, really—to hear its voice at all.

The following conversation was constructed from a long phone interview in early January and some follow-up

laboratory emails. Chasny and I had been in touch off and on for the previous year or so by email, mostly hipping each other to recent discoveries: books, records, films. To be honest, Chasny was doing most of the hipping, and I was struck by both his strong passion for other artists' work and ideas, and the degree of erudition in his reading. His impulse may be towards hermitism and withdrawal, towards living alone in the woods, but the reality of his life is more complex: he's a part of a web of consciousness very much of his own making, one that stretches around the globe and involves many of the planet's most idiosyncratic, hermetic artists. I soon realized that, just as Timothy Leary had instructed, Chasny had gone and found the others—the Japanese psych-folk group Ghost, the bizarre English goth-folk of Current 93's David Tibet, the utterly indescribable Sun City Girls, and many more I'd never heard of. And then, in the past whirlwind year, he'd actually toured or recorded with many of them, while, at the same time, continuing to be a full-fledged member of Bay Area combo Comets

On Fire, whose 2004 album *Blue Cathedral* was some kind of acid rock knockout masterpiece.

Here's how it all happened, in Ben Chasny's own voice.



Who knows what evil lurks in the heart of men? Ben Chasny knows.



HOROSCOPE

by Jeff Johnson

Aquarius

(January 21 - February 19)

You fuck like lightning. Those dirty ankle-biting jerks in the trenches will never take that away from you. You may get audited this month. And sure, someone may borrow your shoes and get them muddy. A stranger may steal your purse—or your man purse, depending on your gender—but your goal is to vault the void created by these subhumans by making love with several people, starting with a neighbor, or community outreach worker, or your shrink. Don't forget about some tenderness, too.



when you were conceived. Cut them some slack. Then get back to the quilting you've been bragging about to everyone.

Virgo

(August 23 - September 23)

Your journal is now complete. So is your journey. Allow yourself to swim around in laziness. Eat cream of anything. Smoke D'Jarums. Drive slowly. Con an old person out of a typewriter and an old Rose Bowl sweatshirt. Get a Black Watch plaid L-A-Zee Boy from the church basement. Start taunting a woman named Christine. Do not bathe. Read all of those moist *Forbes* magazines in the garage next door. Eat pistachios.

Libra

(September 24 - October 23)

Call Sony Music. Ask for the publicist for Judas Priest. Call every day and ask what Rob Halford is doing. At this moment. Copy that.

Scorpio

(October 24 - November 22)

You pretend you're above astrology. But you're pretty earnest about mouthing the words when Don Henley's "End of the Innocence" comes on your stereo. For this reason the next 30 days will be painful for you. I am in charge of your destiny.

Sagittarius

(November 23 - December 21)

You're the tough one. Play shortstop at the company picnic this month. Knock Weaver from accounts payable on his can when he goes a little too wide around second base. When he gets up swinging, take a step back, point and laugh. Turn the whole crew on him. This still does not assure you of a raise or a promotion. In fact, you may be sleeping in an old canoe by month's end. In rush hour traffic. In Pittsburgh.

Capricorn

(December 22 - January 20)

Get to a beach. Don't let anyone know you are winter's child. Do not keep working on your life as is: still life with bong. There's too much yarn and cat to you right now. Get rid of 40 percent of it. Pretend you like Henry Rollins. "He's driven," you'll explain to fellow bus riders. Ask someone to spot you as you bench heavy stuff. Spit a lot.

Pisces

(February 20 - March 20)

You can achieve whatever you want this month. The answer lies within the internet. Just start looking at pages. Google "vision quest" and "Cherry Vanilla Diet Dr. Pepper" within the same search. Does it turn up anything of value? Don't get discouraged if it doesn't. There's still plenty of time to keep going. Keep searching. Keep on top of your goals. Smother them like fat mice.

Aries

(March 21 - April 21)

Now is the time to call your old drug dealer. Bury the hatchet. Buy some foil and do some hot knives over the stove. Then kill him.

Taurus

(April 21 - May 21)

Refer to yourself this month as "The Shaman." Especially while waiting in line somewhere. Let people overhear you. Pummel them with your knowledge. Use coupons whenever possible. Clip them on-site. Ask a waiter or waitress at your favorite restaurant if the kitchen staff can sprinkle a little joy on your meal. If they, in response, roll their eyes and say, "I wish," tell them "Well, that's a start."

Gemini

(May 22 - June 21)

You are the greatest thing in the universe. (Except for Uncle Brian.) Go to your guitar lesson and let the instructor know that you'll be the teacher this time around. Whistle Beethoven...That is all.

Cancer

(June 22 - July 22)

Cancer rhymes with dancer. So you've got that going for you, don't you?

Leo

(July 23 - August 22)

You're not still mad at your parents are you? They were drunk, just like

ARIK MOONHAWK ROPER





COME ON IN MY KITCHEN

What **Mike Patton** learned in his
days of toil at Benihana's

Few working vocalists have done as much with their vocal chords as ex-Faith No More frontman Mike Patton. In the years since that Bay Area bizarre rock band's demise, Patton has built an impressively wide-ranging C. V., including collaborations with jazz composer John Zorn, Japanese noisegod Merzbow and hip-hop concept squad the Handsome Boy Modeling School. His latest projects to see release through Ipecac Recordings, the post-genre label he co-founded and co-owns, are *Suspended Animation*—a bonkers 30-track tribute to the month of April by his band Fantomas (featuring members of

Slayer, Mr. Bungle and Melvins)—and the battle album, *General Patton vs The X-ecutioners*, featuring turntablists DJ Rob Swift, Grandmaster Roc Raida and DJ Total Eclipse. For his turn in the Arthur kitchen, Patton selected a dish that was featured on his record of futurist recipes *Pranzo Oltranzista: Musica da Ravola per Cinque (Banquet Piece for Five Players)*, released on Zorn's Tzadik label in 1997. The tracks were instrumental but had sounds associated with cooking and eating—chopping, slicing, chewing, etc.—while the booklet contained recipes. Says Patton, “This is one of my favorites.”

Carne Crude Squarciata Dal Suono Di Sassofono

(tr. “Raw meat torn by saxophone blasts”)

Cubes of beef marinated in rum, cognac and white vermouth are served on a bed of black pepper and snow. Each mouthful is separated by saxophone blasts blown by the eater himself. ☺



Sam Ott, from *Sigil Logos*, No. 2 of 5

T-MODEL KNOWS BETTER

T-Model Ford is the 84-year-old self-proclaimed “Boss of the Blues,” also known as The Taildragger. Every two months, Arthur calls up T-Model at his home in Greenville, Mississippi and asks some questions about things we have on our mind. T-Model gives his sage answers, then we transcribe the conversation with some interpreting help from the fellas at Fat Possum Records, the Mississippi label that releases T-Model's all-bets-are-off blues albums (more info at www.fatpossum.com). If you've got questions for T-Model, and we suspect that you do, email 'em to editor@arthurmag.com

How do you deal with traffic?

I don't worry about it. I take my time. Don't rush, wait your turn and your time will come. People want to rush too much these days.

Are bad people born that way?

It ain't the way you born. It's how you raised. If you in too much of a rush, you won't raise 'em right.

What's a better pet: a dog or a cat?

A dog, if it's trained, is the best pet. You can't depend on a cat, it's up to its own devilment. But a dog, if you train him right, you can depend on him. You can leave a baby with him and he'll stay right there. He'll make sure that

baby don't get in the road. Pick him with up his teeth and move that baby on back up there. You let a cat out in the yard and he won't stay there.

I had two dogs that a white lady gave to me. I raised them up right, trained them right. Somebody poisoned them. And my cat Tom, while I was playing guitar up the road, somebody let their dog out and killed him. I was pretty mad that night. I got

out there in the yard the next day with my gun, laying up for that dog [to return]. The police came, and I told them, “You ain't taking this gun. It ain't done nothin'—yet.”

I think they took that dog up to the country. They knew what I was fixing to do.

If you've got some cash, what should you do with it? Hide it somewhere, or put it in a bank, or...?

If you want to save it, put it in the bank. You can't hide

nothin' nowadays. So, best to put it in the bank. It didn't used to be that way. But now, the young races is in charge. They rushing around.... Most of the old folk are afraid to go out, because of the teenagers robbin' and fightin' and killin'. If the old folk do go out, they take a gun. Yeah, it's getting rough now, alright.

T-Model Ford is featured at length in the new Fat Possum documentary, *You See Me Laughin'*, available now on DVD. More info at www.fatpossum.com

☺

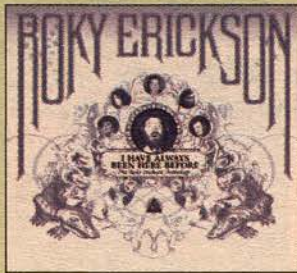




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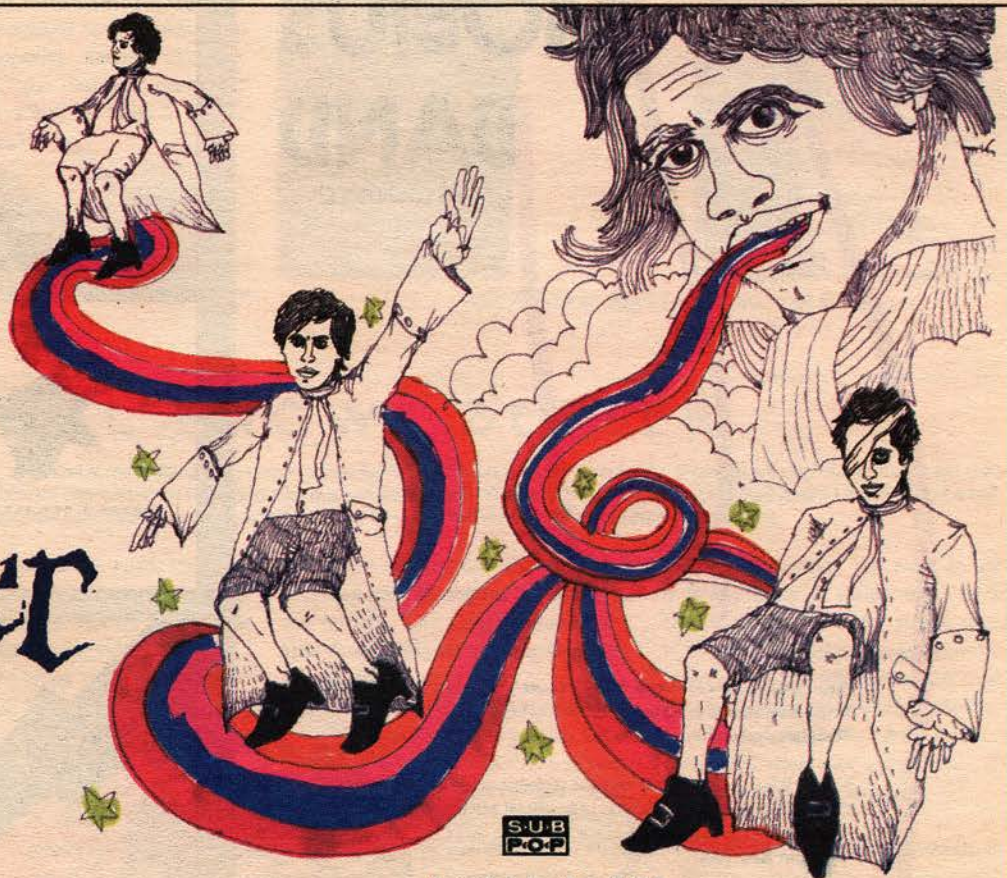
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(continued from page 4)

co-ops are gone, as well as most of the back-to-the-land communes, and the free schools. Low-rent bohemian enclaves have been yupped up, college campuses have grown quiet and dull (except for binge drinking), labor unions have been smashed or corrupted. The "peace movement" can mobilize millions in minutes but mysteriously *nothing happens*—war goes right ahead on schedule. The only force holding back environmental armageddon sometimes appears to consist of a handful of brave doomed eco-saboteurs. Leftist organization in the US takes place mostly in cyberspace, where *nothing happens* except more blahblahblah.

Third parties always end up as mere exercises in futilitarianism, hobby groups for the disgruntled, paper tigers sucking up all dissident energy and turning it into a politics of failure. As far as the Democrats—oh please, I can't.

If not Canada or Holland or something, then what? Do we have to accept some sacred organic link between the landmass called Turtle Island and the regime called the "USA"? Let's say we happen to love our land and our language, that we want to stay here. Yet somehow we also want to *escape* from the sleazy guilt feelings involved with citizenship in the Empire of Stupid Greed. Does this make us schizophrenic?

If a single person is possessed by two antagonistic personalities (call them Red and Blue), the usual solution would be a term in the bughouse. But if a whole state has a split personality, it can actually split. Part of it can secede.

Naturally the government is going to tell you this is a crazy notion, and treasonous as well. The Constitution is our holy founding document and can never be revoked. Too bad you were born too late to sign the Social Contract, but that's how it is. The Civil War decided it once and for all. Thou shalt not secede.

This argument, delivered with a gun to the head, is persuasive and even conclusive. The US government is not going to allow itself to devolve. Only Indians are permitted to have "independent" reservations and only certain genes carry the right to tribal recognition (in other words *race* still defines political status in US law). If you don't like it here go back to Russia...uh... or Sweden, or maybe some rogue nation in the Axis of Evil. What are you, a terrorist?

But wait.

Who would have dared to predict in (let's say) 1984 that the Soviet Empire was about to break up into dozens of independent little countries?

Or—to take an even more astonishing example—who could've foreseen that Scotland (a part of Great Britain since 1707) would succeed in achieving independence again after 300 years? (It's hard to get information on this, but I gather that the miracle was achieved by a strange coalition of Labour and Scots Nationalists.)

In any case, devolution of the USSR and UK would not have occurred without prior economic collapse. A rich empire will tend to cohere, a bankrupt one to Decline and even Fall. With hindsight we can see this clearly. But foresight is always skewed by *appearances*. The US is believed to be the super-wealthy hegemon of the Global Market and land of total affluence, and so we see it that way.

But is it?

What about the deficit spending, that insane waste of war, that deep debt? America actually produces very little except weapons, data and entertainment—no shoes, no umbrellas, no pencils. Globalism demands that whole countries be proletarianized for the benefit of other countries that can then be called bourgeois or ruling-class. But what if Globalism itself has been derailed by US greed and revanchism? What if Europe gets so fed up with the US that it begins to elect leftoid governments that refuse to serve our interests? What if China went "off the dollar" and on to the Euro? What about a major depression in America? Would that make secession look more "realistic" and less crazy?

Under these conditions (...four more years...) the question of legality might become relevant. Is it in fact legal to secede? The SVR says yes, at least in theory. The Civil War did not decide the issue. In 1789 the Constitution looked like a very bad deal to the true revolutionaries and Jeffersonians, then called "Anti-Federalists." These radicals liked the Articles of Confederation (based on the Iroquois Confederation, according to many historians) which recognized the thirteen states as independent entities. They made many of the same arguments as the Small-Is-Beautiful school—for instance, that only in small autonomous regions can practical direct democracy work fairly and efficiently.

But the Anti-Federalists were outmaneuvered by Alexander Hamilton and the big bankers. Eventually all the states acceded and ratified. However in three states the protocols of ratification included a *guarantee of the right to secede*—Virginia, Rhode Island and New York. These protocols have never been rescinded or even challenged in law. By the logic of the Constitution itself, a right that belongs to one state must belong to all. Ergo:

secession is legal, q.e.d.

Tell it to the judge, you might say. Or quoting the German fascist legal philosopher Karl Schmidt: law is made by power, not reason or precedent. But if the US Empire loses its power to define law, then secession may become "legal" de facto in the act of secession. Civil war may not be necessary—again, see the case of Scotland, or Estonia. "Devolution" happens.

Although the result of secession would be a new state, many anarchists and anti-authoritarians have supported it as a tactic, a good first step toward small-region autonomy. During the Civil War the American anarchist Lysander Spooner shocked people by supporting both abolition of slavery and the right of secession. Proudhon believed in secession and anarchy-federation. Emma Goldman supported the secession of Catalonia from fascist Spain. Nestor Makno fought for a free Ukraine; and so on. In fact secession has a potential appeal across a wide spectrum of political creeds, since anyone can hope to gain power (or at least a voice) in a new small state.

If you don't care for Vermont-style secession there are plenty of other movements afoot. Capital-L Libertarians ("Republicans who smoke dope," as Robert Anton Wilson calls them) have organized the New Hampshire Project, hoping to live free or die. Texas has an old and rather wacky independence movement (I

once met their "Ambassador to the Court of St. James" in Dublin after he'd been evicted from his London "embassy" for unpaid rent).

Hawaii has a sovereignty movement based on the old native monarchy, overthrown by US forces in 1893; and there are many other tribal separatist causes. Black nationalists and separatists have their visions of utopia. Alaska has a group, and in Maine a "militia" with secessionist ideals has been founded by novelist Caroline Chute (*The Beans of Egypt*). In New York City, the secessionists want to secede from New York State as well as the USA. And in the process they plan to have some fun.

Being urban cynics unlike the sincere Vermonters, the NYC secessionists don't necessarily expect to succeed. But the City has always dreamed of independence—a tradition no doubt dating back at least to Dutch resentment of the Brits, and farmers' hatred of feudal landlords. We New Yorkers (I speak here for at least a dozen people) simply feel that folks with no power have nothing to fear from the "politics of the very worst." If the Empire's going to implode, let it. At least we'll be ready with some sort of Plan B.

In the meantime we expect a bit of political adventure, and some good parties. Maybe eventually the other kind of party, too. A good motto for us would be Fats Waller's famous saying: "One never knows—do one?"

⊖



Sam Ott, from *Sigil Logos*, No. 3 of 5

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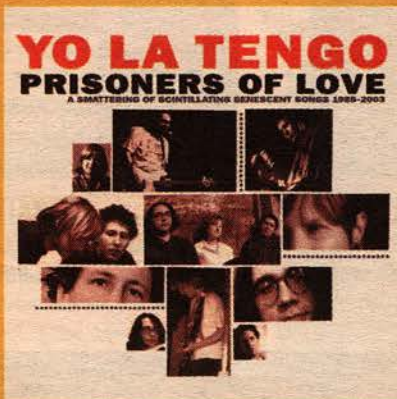
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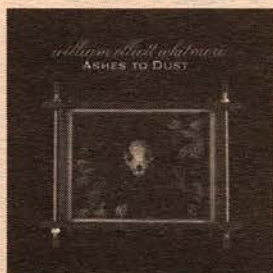
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Becca Taylor



REALITY AS SUBVERSION

I had a weird vision the other day.

Having brought our newborn back from the hospital just days before, my wife and I were not getting much sleep. I lay on the bed next to the baby and slipped into one of those Theta wave trances you can reach on the way to a magick spell, visionquest, or psychedelic trip.

I was in a natural chamber of some kind, maybe a cave or clearing in a woods. It was a starting place from which any number of journeys could be taken. At each opening, another creature or entity beckoned me to follow it. And, had it been any other time in my life, I probably would have picked the one that seemed the most promising and followed it down the twists and turns of its path—and been either delighted or terrified by what happened. (The idea of being an experienced traveler or magician is getting better at predicting, guiding, or simply tolerating the variety of what's on offer, and learning to bring back things or ideas of value.)

This time, however, for no particular reason other than really being okay with floating in that little entrance foyer, I decided to stay put. The beckoning entities gave up and scurried or drifted down their reality tunnels, and I lay there, motionless.

Only then, after I decided to do nothing, did I notice the Elders. Three or four of them—shamans, prophets, Zen masters, or some combination—sitting on a bench to my side, looking down at me. "Welcome," they said, nodding. And I immediately got it. By doing nothing, I was doing everything. The path of no path. Just be.

And though I've spent a career, maybe even a whole lifetime creating realities for myself and others as a way of retreating from the oppressive consensus culture of the American Marketplace, I'm wondering if we might best abandon that tactic. Maybe, it's time to stand still and let *them* do the conjuring.

Hear me out.

What I teach in my classes is that the



JACK POLLOCK

THE POWERS THAT BE ARE COMMITTED TO RETAKING CONTROL OF THE IMAGE FACTORY. MAYBE WE SHOULD LET THEM HAVE IT.

evolution of media shows control of the story moving away from the teller, and towards the reader or listener. That is, the invention of text allowed people other than priests and royals to read and write, showing human beings that they were contributing to the human story. Thanks to the alphabet, we got the Judeo-Christian tradition, laws, and all those notions of progress.

The printing press put texts in the hands of many, leading to the democratization of interpretation, the development of perspective, and eventually the Enlightenment. If all perspectives matter, then all people matter equally.

Although TV set things back a bit, deconstruction and post-modernism came to the rescue, giving us all the ability to take apart what we see, and disassemble the many messages being piped into our living rooms and brains. Master deconstructionists, from William Burroughs and Bryon Gysin to Genesis P-Orridge and Negativland, cut up the news and paste it back together in new ways, in Burroughs'

words, to find out "what it *really* says."

Of course, they were only foretelling the advent of the Internet, which turned the whole mediascape—the primary landscape of alternative media creation—over to us. Now, at least in theory, we are as capable of creating and disseminating a message as anyone else. Your basic middle class American teen (admittedly, among the planet's better equipped individuals) can build a set of images, texts, or videos that extend his visions to the greater world. Rupert Murdoch's ideas matter no more than those of the kid posting on Slashdot.

And so we fight for our rights or even just our freedom to do what we want to in the media space. To keep our Bittorrents flowing and our alternative media blogs rolling. We know the power of image creation, and want to retain our ability to make the images that stimulate, hypnotize, and program our world.

That's why the powers that be are so committed to retaking control of the image factory. Whether it's *American Idol* recasting its stacked deck talent

show as some sort of SMS-enabled democracy, or Project Echelon monitoring all our keystrokes so that truly subversive material can be cut off at the source, we're witnessing first hand the dismemberment of our new body politic. Just as the forces of business turned the original Internet into a strip mall, they are now bribing the most popular bloggers with ad-based revenues and creating watered-down simulations of online autonomy.

Meanwhile, they distract us with scary stories about how the latest and greatest technologies will be used against us. Neuromarketing, for example, the latest new tool in the advertising arsenal, is supposedly capable of using MRI technology to measure, definitively, our response to packages and advertisements. They shove some poor soul into an MRI machine (that could be used for a diagnosing a sick person) and then show him some Coke or Pepsi labels and then see what parts of the brain light up. Then fascinated but misguided journalists write bestselling books about that moment of decision that supposedly takes place independent of any conscious or rational process. Worse, these subconscious triggers can be tripped intentionally by any marketer or political linguist with the access and money.

That's magick, people. And fake magick, at that, except for the fact that we believe this shit. It just isn't true. It's the kind of tripe that marketers and advertisers use to peddle their wares to the companies trying to compete with real culture, real thought, and real human progress. Of course the books claiming that our most important decisions happen "in a blink" are going to sell well, because they are part of the culture of selling.

It's no wonder we get fooled by such stuff. For in our effort to exert some measure of control over our reality, we have migrated to the semiotic landscape—fighting with image and symbol, rhetoric and reason. In the spirit of Hegel, we match their faulty

A person wearing a red hoodie is shown from the chest up, facing slightly to the right. The hoodie is a deep red color. The background is a light, textured beige.

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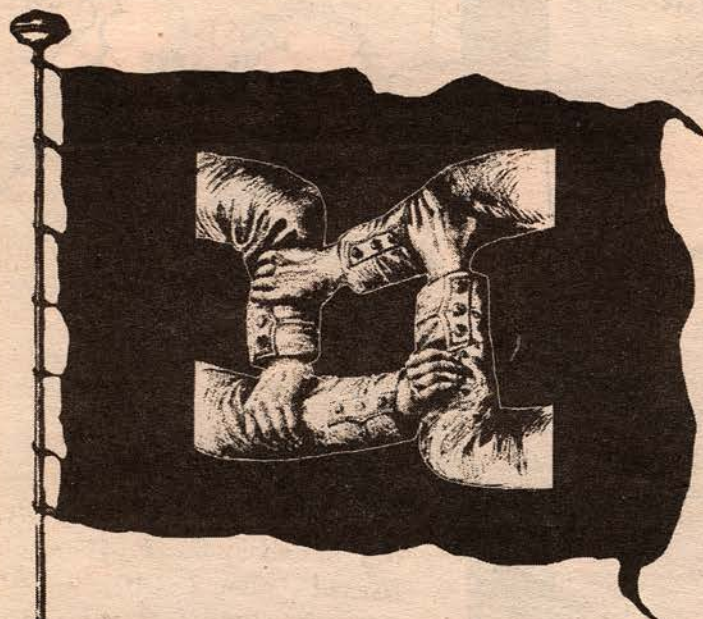
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thesis with our daring antithesis, but forget that neither one necessarily brings us any closer to the truth. Just because you've got two opposing arguments doesn't mean they resolve into some reality-based synthesis. (Two politicians can argue about whether the tax code should have 39 or 40 lines while a peasant starves on the Capitol steps.)

The realities that marketers offer us, just like the ones we offer back in return, are speciously detached from reality on the ground. Sure, they provide solutions to our problems, but from where do those problems originate?

As a new parent, I've been painfully aware of how little real community there is around us. This is a market success. Our parents are too far, our friends are too shy, the mothering old ladies are nowhere to be found. So who teaches my wife to breast feed? The "lactation consultant." Yes—there is such a thing! And who watches the baby when we have to take a shower or get to work? Not a family member or friend down the hall, but a professional babysitter, daycare center or nanny. The diminishment of community is what fuels these new markets.

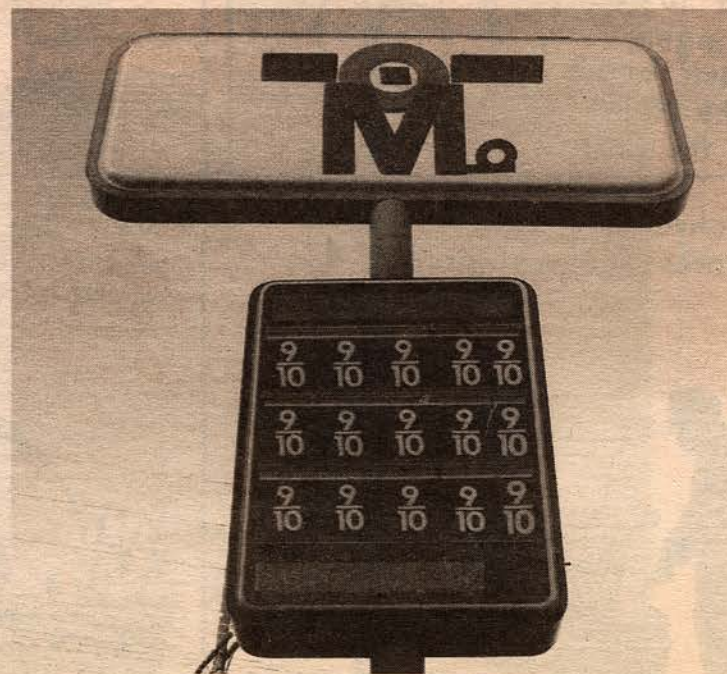
The greatest magic act of all—the unrecognized king of all sigils—was the creation of the dollar itself. We support the reality of this symbol whether we're going after dollars or complaining about the lack of opportunity to accumulate them. By taking the very real values of wealth and prosperity and assigning them to the symbol of money, we dissociated our labor from the real. Sure, if we had some authority over that symbol system we might be in business. But we don't: it's the most protected and inaccessible set of mythology around. No cut-and-paste permitted, William.

I'm thinking we should let them win. Surrender the unreal realities to the bad guys. If they want broadcast television, mainstream newspapers, or even the web, let 'em have it. They've conjured up an alternative universe that has very little true connection to what's really going on here. And the market-based, competitive, reality-as-propaganda dream has swallowed them up. They are the victims of their own illusions. We don't have to be.

We can take charge of the real reality they left behind. I mean the world we're actually living in. The yards and streets and fingers and tongues. Let's build bike lanes and barbecues, after school programs and AIDS care networks, places to play music and playgrounds for kids. They're so busy monitoring the airwaves for signs of treason against the market or state that they've lost track of what's happening between real people. Turn off your cell phone and speak to that guy sitting next to you on the bus. That's about the most subversive thing you could do.

Instead, like well-meaning Pied Pipers, we play our tunes hoping the children might follow us instead of the other guy taking them off the cliff. But when we enter into that competition, we're no better than the tune we can muster at that moment. If ours is more hypnotic or captivating than theirs, we win for the time being, and keep the kids believing our version of things until the next round.

And in entering that pissing contest, we deny ourselves the home field advantage. We *live* here, after all. If we can learn to sit still for a moment rather than following any of those phantoms, we can take over *real* reality instead. It's right here for the taking.



Sam Ott, from *Sigil Logos*, No. 4 of 5

I GOT THROUGH THE SUMMER DOING FREE-LANCE ILLUSTRATION JOBS.



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DIARY of A BREAD DELIVERY GUY



I like this job. I like the calm of pre-dawn Seattle. I feel good to be bringing organic bread to the people of the city...

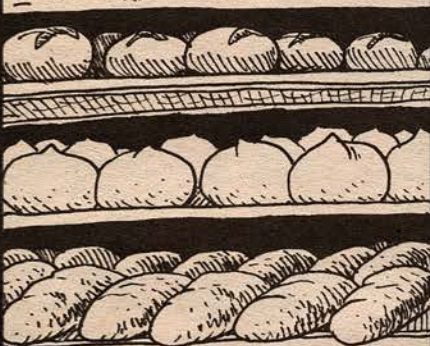
Good karma...

I check in at various grocery stores and restaurants



... and count out what I've brought.

I show up in the morning at around 4 a.m. That's the hardest part: 4 a.m.

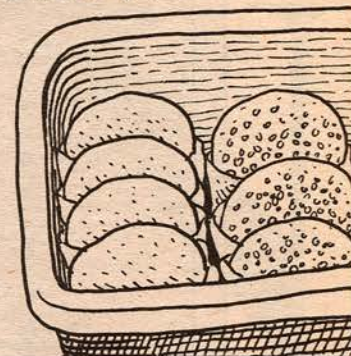


The racks are filled with the bread that's been baked the night before.

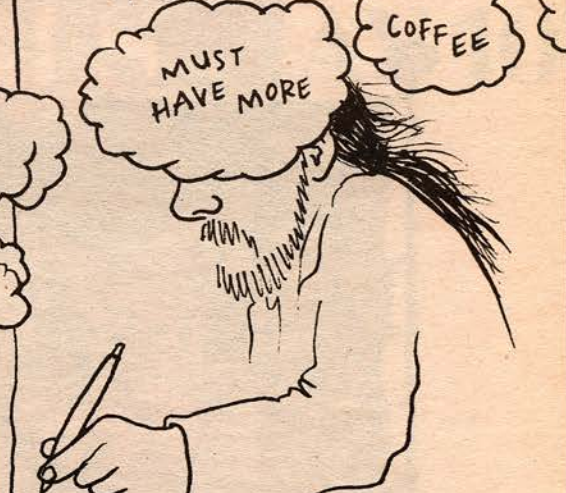
BUT... to accomplish this good work, I am depleting fossil fuels and polluting the crisp morning air.



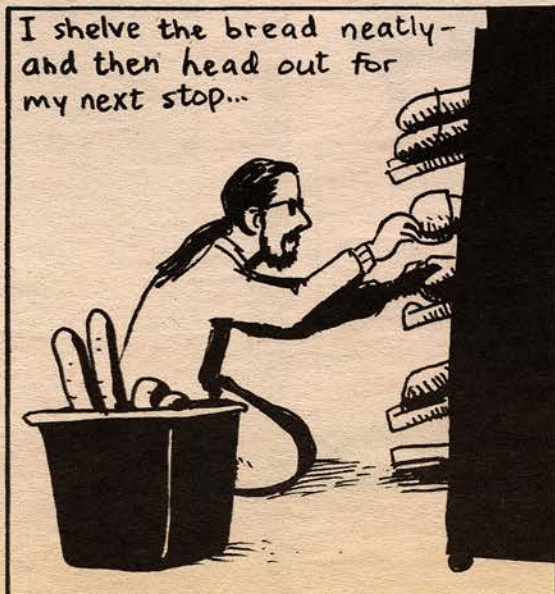
I put the loaves in bags, and pack them in bins. The bins are loaded into an Econoline van which I start on its journey at around 6:30...



The hardest days are Wednesdays — 5 or 6 hours of work followed by 6 hours of school.

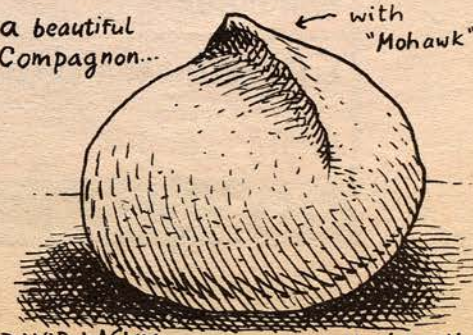


I shelve the bread neatly — and then head out for my next stop...



At times, it seems that delivering bread is the most noble and useful thing I can do. And I have to wonder if my chosen career of graphic design will ever measure up.

a beautiful Compagnon...



DAVID LASKY

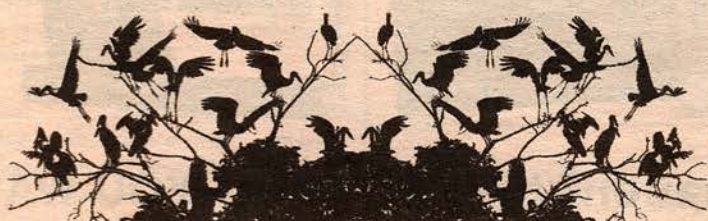
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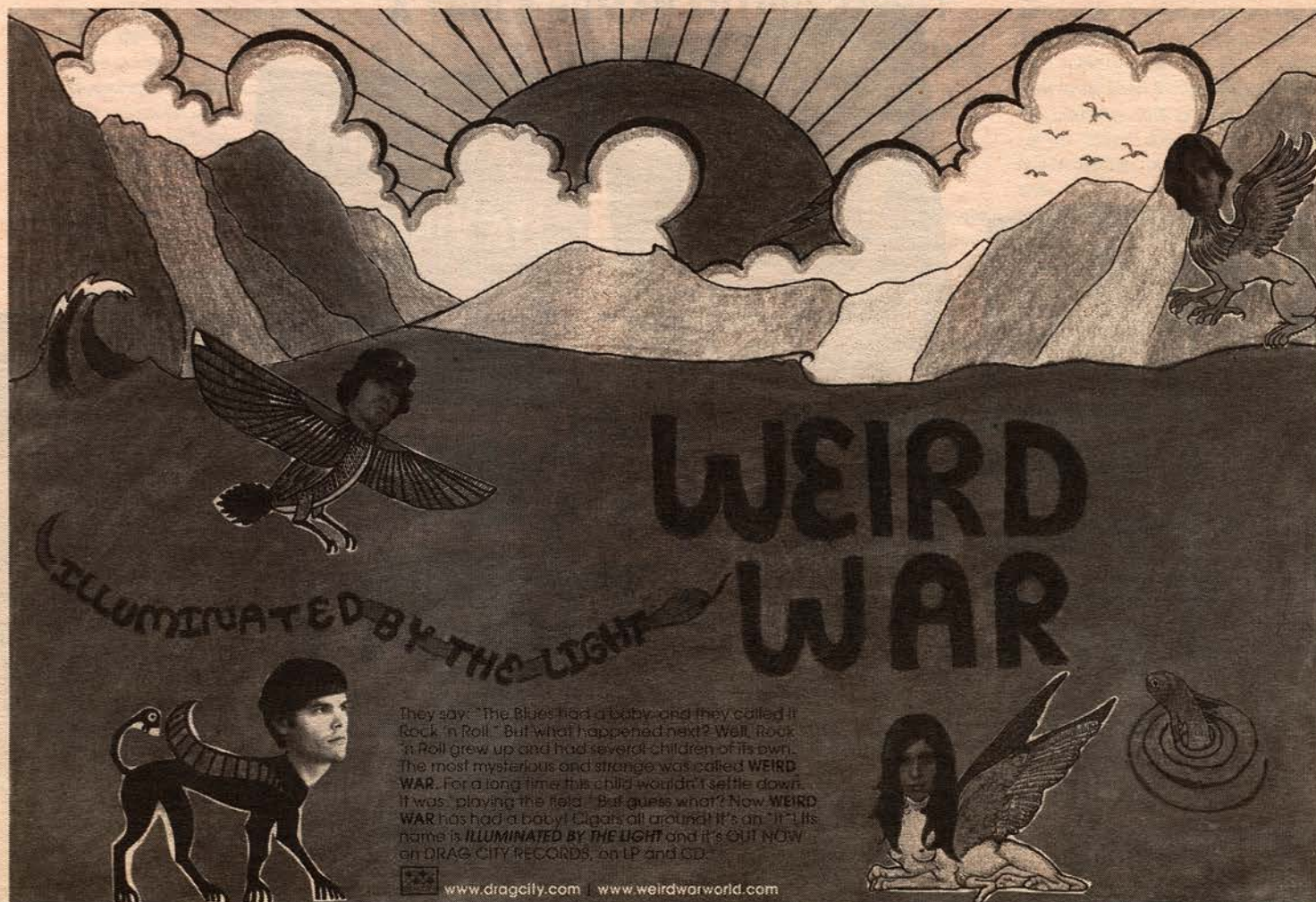


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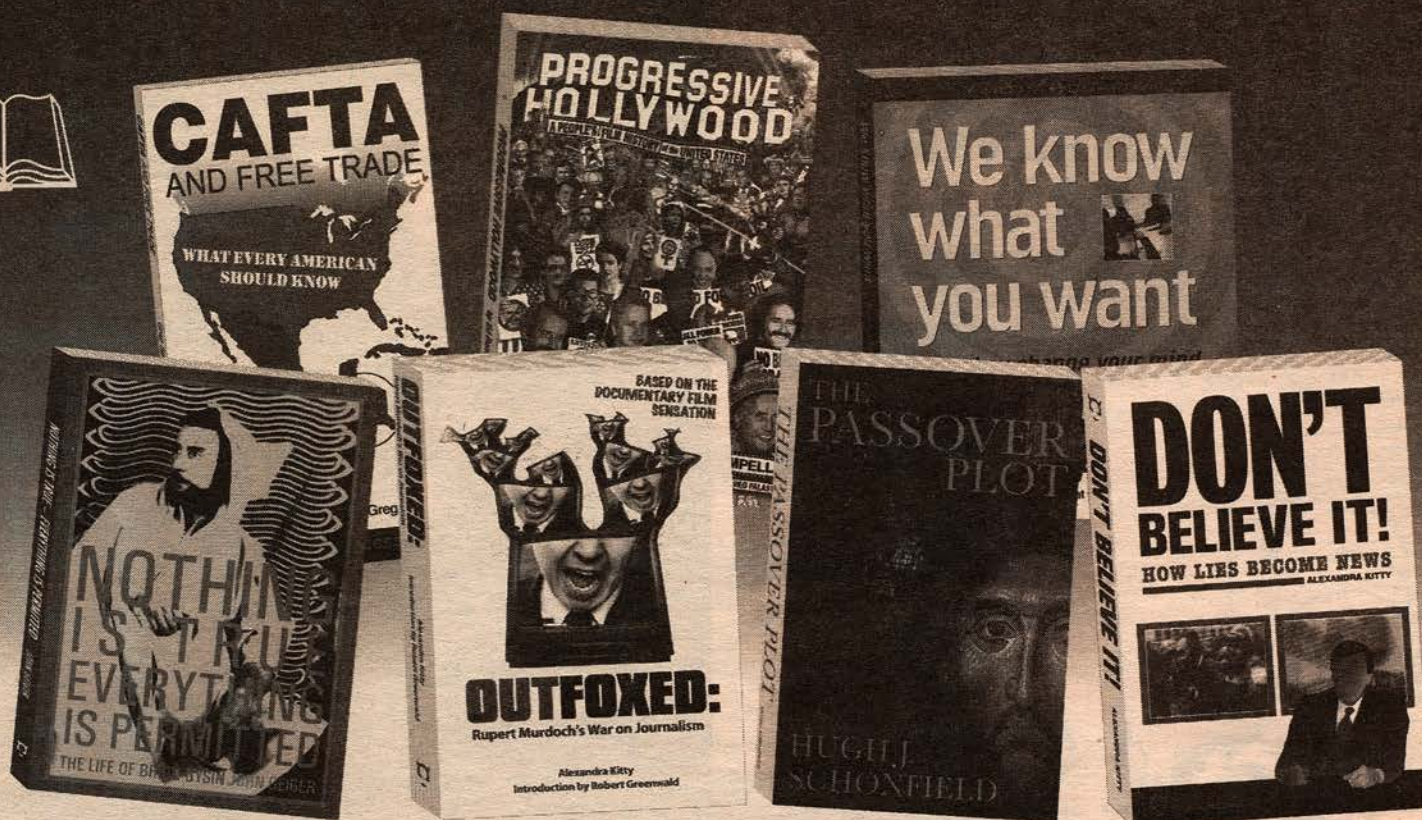
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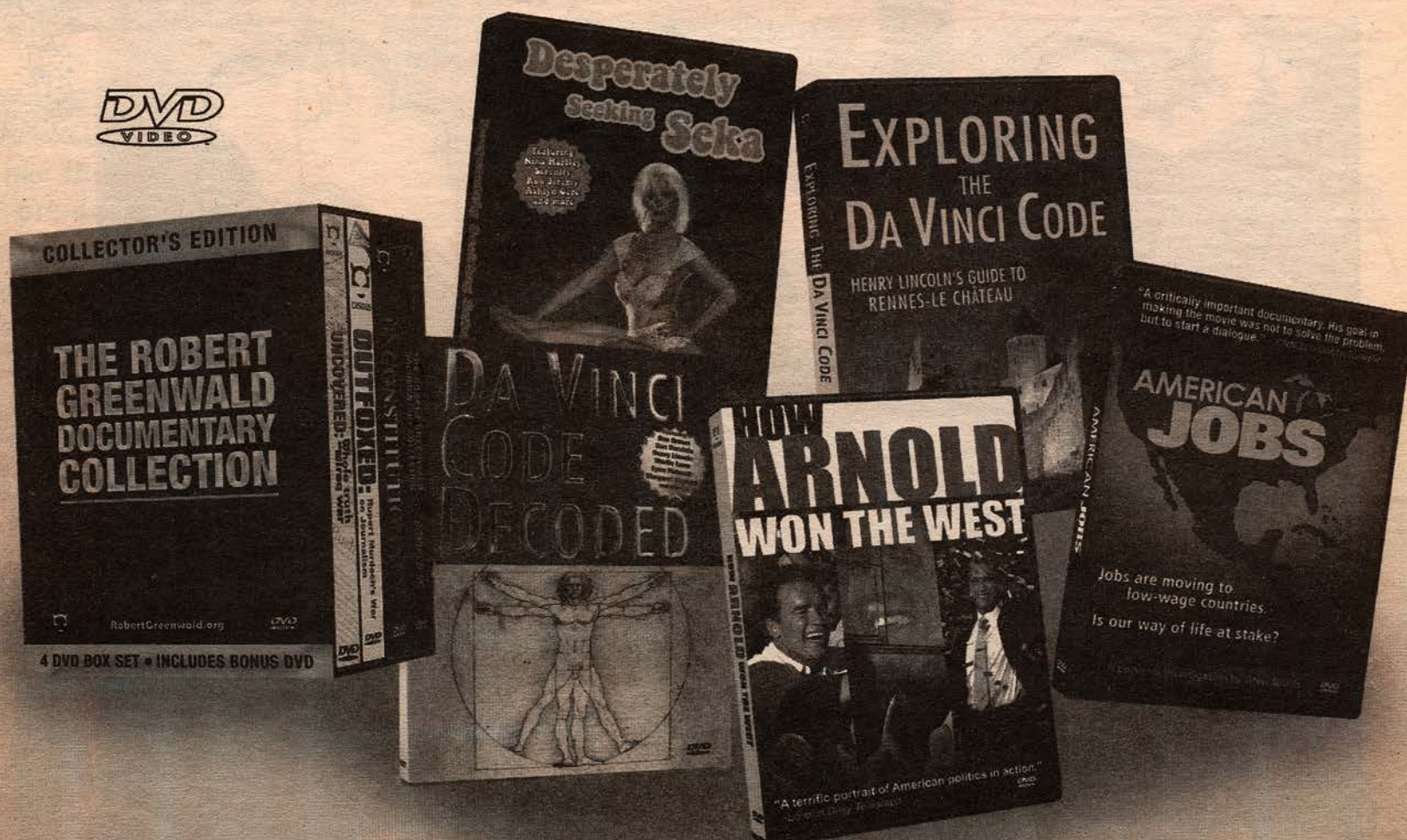


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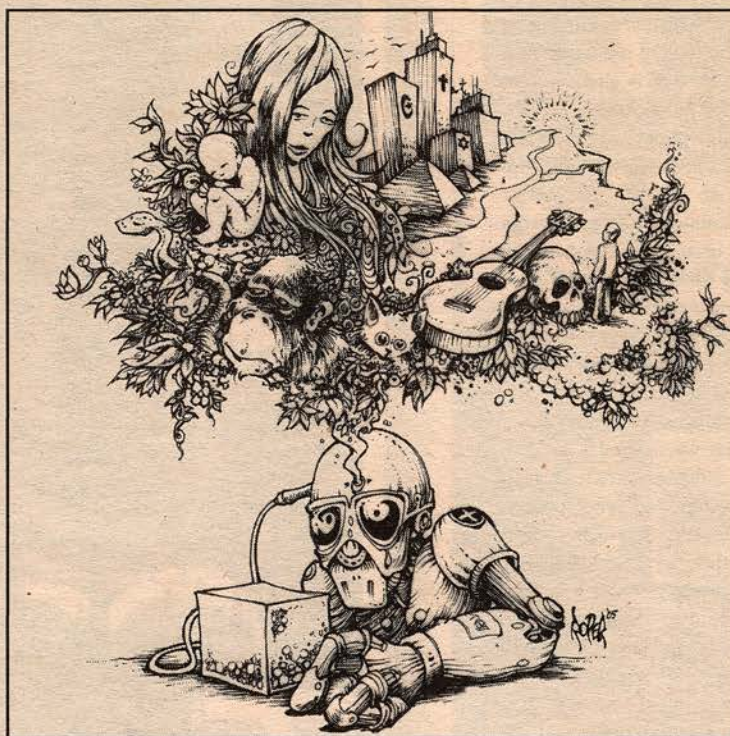


A FUTURE WORTH HAVING

I first encountered the idea that we are quickly approaching a "Technological Singularity" in the works of Terence McKenna. In McKenna's great essay, "New Maps of Hyperspace," published in *The Archaic Revival*, he wrote, "We are like coral animals embedded in a technological reef of extruded psychic objects. All our tool making implies our belief in an ultimate tool." He saw the archetypal apparition of the UFO or Flying Saucer as a foreshadowing of this tool awaiting us at the end of history. For him, this ultimate tool would exteriorize the human soul and interiorize the body, releasing the psyche into the infinite realm of the Imagination—"a kind of Islamic paradise in which one is free to experience all the pleasures of the flesh provided one realizes that one is a projection of a holographic solid-state matrix."

McKenna was writing in the first flush of technological euphoria that accompanied the dot-com boom, and his perspective reflects a certain amount of that decades-long bedazzlement with the new forces unleashed by the extraordinary evolution of the Internet. Ultimately, however, his perspective was Gnostic, as well as Apocalyptic, informed by his psychedelic journeys into psilocybin and DMT-space. McKenna was a brilliant man. However, his euphoric focus on the self-organization of this technological event—which he often correlated with the 2012 end-date of the Mayan Calendar—left in its wake a certain passivity. The hipster counterculture that has beamed into this meme is too quick to celebrate the upcoming Eschaton, without doing the hard work required to bring it into being. From my perspective, what we need to consider now is not technology, but technique.

Before elaborating on that idea, let's take a brief look at the "Technological Singularity" meme as it is currently propounded on the Internet by John Smart, of Singularity Watch, and



ARIK MOONHAWK ROPER

TO DRAW IN AN IMPRINT OF WHAT A TRULY HUMAN FUTURE MIGHT LOOK LIKE, WE FIRST HAVE TO GIVE SOME THOUGHT TO THE ESSENTIAL NATURE OF TECHNOLOGY.

Ray Kurzweil, author of *The Age of Spiritual Machines* and operator of the KurzweilAI.net website. Kurzweil and Smart are "transhumanists," who promote the prospect of an imminent super-technological future in which humans have merged with machines in order to transcend our biological limits. In his essay "The Law of Accelerating Returns," Kurzweil looks at the exponential evolution of technology, and argues that this mathematical growth-curve eventually reaches a point where it accelerates to a level that is close to infinite. He believes that this will most likely occur sometime in this century: "Within a few decades, machine intelligence will surpass human intelligence, leading to The Singularity—technological change so rapid and profound it represents a rupture in the fabric of human history. The implications include the merger of biological and nonbiological intelligence, immortal software-based humans, and ultra-high levels of intelligence that expand outward in the universe at the speed of light."

Smart shares Kurzweil's euphoria: "Technology is the next organic extension of ourselves, growing with a speed, efficiency, and resiliency that must eventually make our DNA-based technology obsolete, even as it preserves and extends all that we value most in ourselves," he noted in a 2003 interview. Unlike Kurzweil, who sees humans evolving technologies that expand out to fill up the universe, Smart sees the eventual destiny of the species in what he calls "transcension," essentially escaping this universe in the other direction, by creating simulations or virtual realities that will be like new universes—or, in fact, new universes, as we draw all local information into the black hole of our information-processing and technology-generating engines.

The transhumanists begin with the idea that our biological limitations should be overcome through mechanical augmentation. We are too slow, too cumbersome in our inherited meatsuits, and therefore trapped in what Smart calls "slowspace." Through

immersion in virtual realities or direct fusion with cerebrally accelerating artificial intelligence agents—or some other technological genie—we will leap beyond our current imprisonment in the organic realm, and attain a higher, faster, snazzier state of being. Kurzweil notes: "Biological thinking is stuck at 1026 calculations per second (for all biological human brains), and that figure will not appreciably change, even with bioengineered changes to our genome. Nonbiological intelligence, on the other hand, is growing at a double exponential rate and will vastly exceed biological intelligence well before the middle of this century." By inserting "nanobots" into our brains or ultimately perhaps downloading our psyches into immortal silicon-based supercomputers, humans will be able to contribute our pitiful little brain-wattage and antiquated personalities to the evolution of A.I.'s higher, faster levels of functioning.

We can, in fact, according to Smart, even feel some compassion for the next level of machine consciousness we are currently gestating to succeed us. He writes, "Consider that once we arrive at the singularity it seems highly likely that the A.I.'s will be just as much on a spiritual quest, just as concerned with living good lives and figuring out the unknown, just as angst-ridden as we are today." Even if, during some hyper-insectile phase of Terminator-style behavior, the A.I.'s accidentally destroy the human species, Smart reassures us, they would no doubt want to recreate us eventually—just as we build museums to understand the history of our planet and how we arose out of earlier life-forms, as well as documenting indigenous cultures that we too have accidentally destroyed.

It is instructive to consider—and to dismiss—the transhumanist perspective, as it reflects our cultural fantasies about technology and about transcendence, as well as our deep anxiety and deeper misconceptions about the essence of time, space, consciousness, and being. It may

be the case—I would propose—that our future lies in an entirely different direction. To begin to conceptualize that direction—to draw in an imprint of what a truly human future might look like—we first have to give some thought to the essential nature of technology.

In his essay, "The Question Concerning Technology," the philosopher Martin Heidegger noted that the essence of technology cannot be found in any machine or in anything technological; the essence of technology is the entire "enframing" of reality that is our modern or post-modern worldview. "The threat to man does not come in the first instance from the potentially lethal machines and apparatus of technology," Heidegger writes. "The actual threat has already afflicted man in his essence." Technology, as Heidegger notes—and Smart and Kurzweil would no doubt agree—is no mere human doing. It is based on an ordering of reality that turns everything—including human beings—into a "standing reserve," a resource to be utilized for rationalized ends. The barren architecture of the vast housing projects on the edge of our cities, prison-boxes where masses of humanity are warehoused as "surplus labor" to serve the desires of the elite, illustrates this worldview perfectly.

The concept that more speed, more information, or any form of quantity-based extension or technological transcendence of our current human reality is somehow valuable, in and of itself, is one that needs to be interrogated. An alternative perspective is offered by the Hindu guru Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj in the book *I Am That*: "Get hold of the main thing: That the world and the self are one and perfect. Only your attitude is faulty and needs readjustment." A faulty attitude creates a faulty world—a world of insufficiency, in which human beings are reduced to the status of things. It is a world of endless distractions, and "distractions from distraction," where entertainment or infotainment or pure noise are employed to fill the void of the individual self, the empty signifier. It is a world in which the present moment is devalued, and our eschatological dreams are projected on an empty future.

Heidegger notes that the origin of the word "technology" comes from the Greek word *techne*, and this word was applied not only to technology, but to art, and artistic technique, as well. "Once there was a time when the bringing-forth of the true into the beautiful was also called *techne*," he writes. "Once that revealing which brings forth truth into the splendor of radiant appearance was also called *techne*." He found this to be a numinous correspondence, and considered that, in art, the "saving

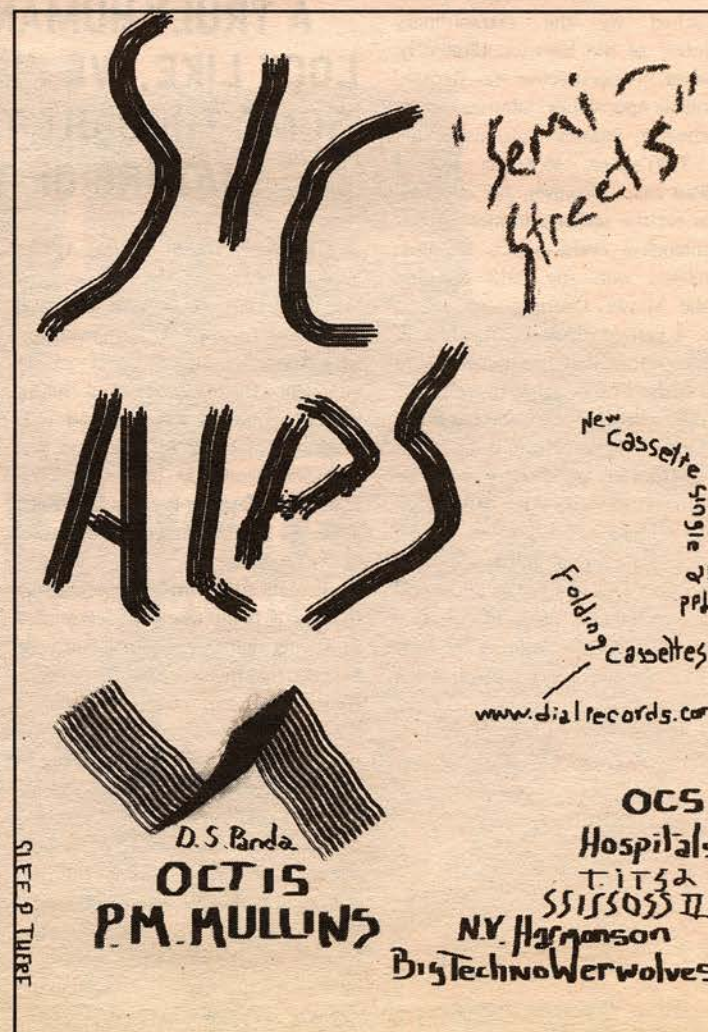
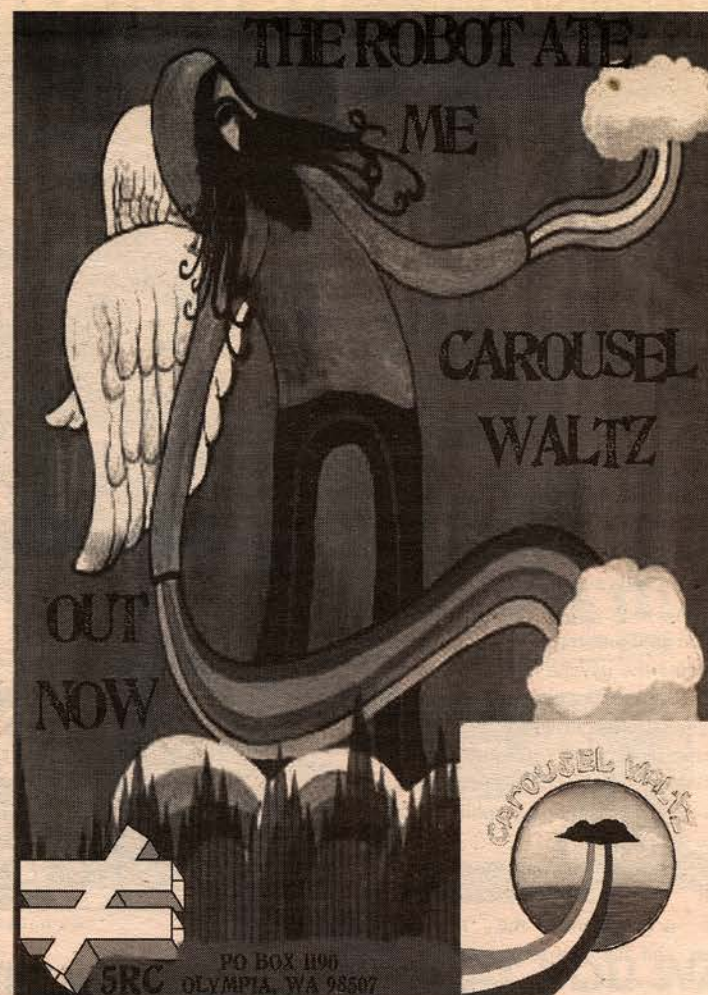
power" capable of confronting the abyss of the technological enframing might be found.

If art provides a "saving power," it is not in the atomized artworks produced by individuated subjects, but in a more profound revisioning of the world as a work of art—one that is already, from a nondualistic perspective, perfect. It may be that, instead of envisioning an ultimately boring "technological singularity," we would be better served by orienting ourselves towards an evolution of technique, of skillful means, aimed at this world, as it is right now, to raise up and redeem all of the people in it. Technology might find its proper place in our lives if we first made such a shift in perspective—in a society oriented around technique, we might find that we desired a lot less technological gadgetry. If we truly lived in love and wonder and synchronicity, embracing the perfection of the world and one another, we might find our iPods and laptops to be annoying encumbrances. We might start to prefer slowness to speed, subtlety and complexity to products aimed at standardized mind. Rather than projecting the spiritual quest and the search for the good life onto futuristic A.I.s, we could actually fulfill those goals, here and now, in the present company of our friends and lovers.

Instead of a "technological singularity," I propose reorienting thinking towards the "multiplicity of technique." Technique is erotic in essence; it is what Glenn Gould or Thelonius Monk express through the piano—the interplay between learned skill and quantum improvisation that is the stuff of genius. Technique embraces the "nowness" of our living world; technology throws us into endless insatiation.

The essence of art lies in the unlimited realm of the imagination, which is, as William Blake noted, not a state, but the human existence in itself. McKenna proposed that the imagination was akin to a lens that could be focused on different layers and levels of the morphogenetic field of the psyche. The effort to attain a deeper or intensified level of consciousness brings one to the threshold of the imaginal realms that unfurl in dreams and hypnagogic and psychedelic states, where one picks up the hidden vibrations of the dreamtime realms known to the Australian Aborigines. By reattuning ourselves to those subtle frequencies, we will first discover, and then create, a future worth having.

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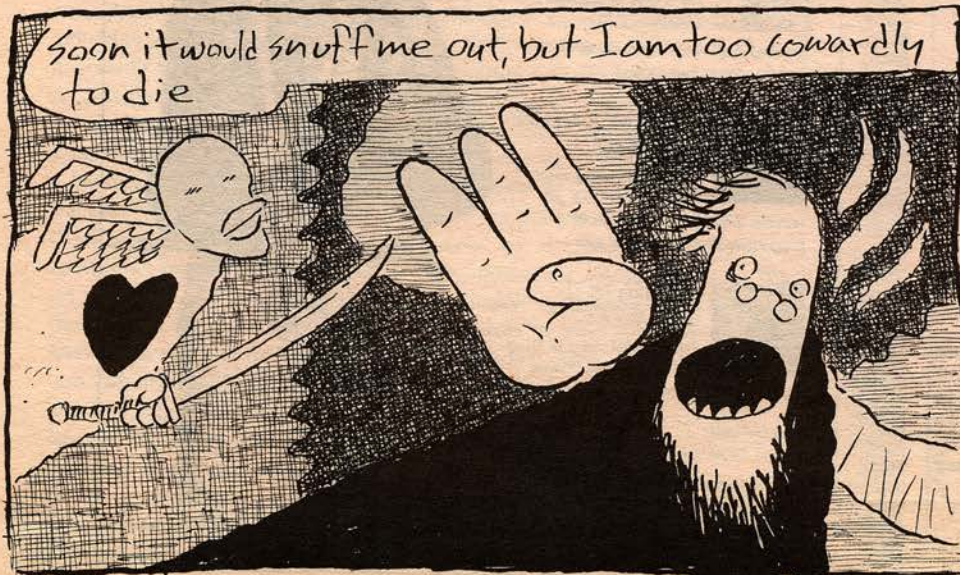
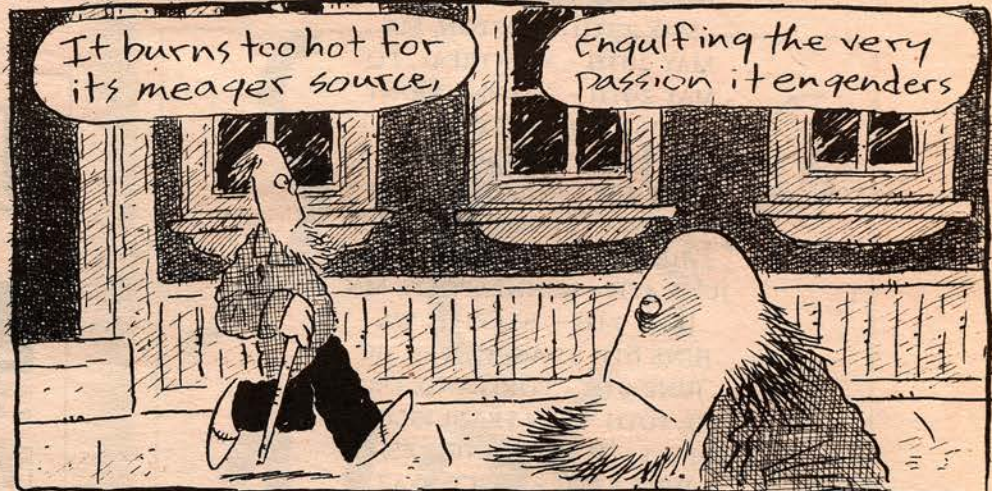
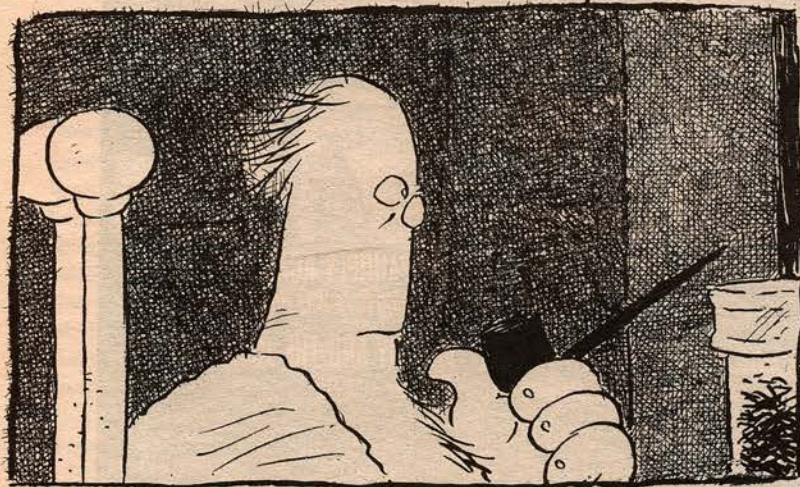
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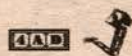
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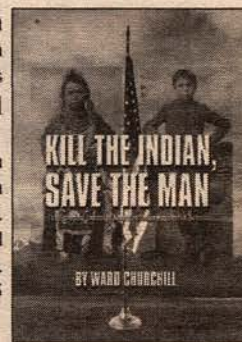
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Druid Heights residents, shot by Stephen Frisch around 1970. Includes Alan Watts (Zen robes), Elsa Gidlow (short grey hair), Roger Somers (cap), Ed Stiles (back row, with child) and Margo St. James (to Stiles' left).

DRUIDS AND FERRIES

Erik Davis investigates spiritual hedonism, artistic communion and shared bohemian poverty in two of 20th century Northern California's legendary Marin County enclaves. Photography by **Michael Rauner**.

I first heard about Druid Heights a few years ago when I began doing research for a book about the history of alternative spirituality in my home state of California. A musician, Colin Farish, described a gorgeously constructed round wooden building hidden in the woods of Marin County that once served as a library for Alan Watts. Farish told me that the building was condemned, and that he was working hard to save it, perhaps by transporting it elsewhere. It turned out that Farish had lived on the property where the library stood, a hidden bohemian community that went by the intriguing name of Druid Heights.

The Heights was and is one of those rare places that is known but not known. It was the site of hundreds of amazing parties over the last 50 years and yet remained tucked beneath some freaky beatnik cone of silence, its muddy dirt road still unmarked on many maps. I became, as they say, fascinated, and began to dip into the history of this extraordinary place, whose highs and lows could fill a multi-volume tragicomic saga, a countercultural Peyton Place.

The story of Druid Heights begins when the longtime lover of the New York poet Elsa Gidlow died on the eve of World War II. Devastated, Gidlow decided

to abandon her bohemian enclave of Greenwich Village and hitchhike to California. This was an unusual thing for a woman to do in 1940, but Gidlow was an unusual woman. Fiercely independent and largely self-educated, Gidlow had been raised in poverty before moving to New York to edit a poetry journal as a young woman. She was both an anarchist and a lesbian, and in 1923, published *On a Grey Thread*, the first unabashedly sapphic book of poetry issued in the United States. She could handle hitching across the states.

Arriving in Marin County, Gidlow holed up in a derelict house in rural Fairfax. She was 40 years old. Facing



The Mandala

winter solstice alone and unsettled, she decided to perform what she later described as a “transforming ritual.” As a storm raged outside the leaky house, she built up a roaring blaze of madrone logs. Slowly, Gidlow sensed the room fill with the spirits of all the mothers and grandmothers who have ever tended fire, all the way back to the Paleolithic. “I knew myself linked by chains of fire,” she wrote, “to every woman who has kept a hearth.” In the morning, Gidlow honored this rather neo-pagan vision by wrapping some of the cold coals in foil and red ribbon, and keeping them for next year’s solstice fire.

In 1954, Gidlow brought one of these solstice charcoals to her new home, a junky five-acre patch of rural hillside on the edge of Muir Woods, lying at the end of a precarious road more

clay than dirt. Shadowed by a looming wall of eucalyptus to the southwest, a few tumble-down frame houses and barns were already returning to earth, and there was no plumbing to speak of. Gidlow dubbed the place Druid Heights, and it would soon blaze into a hidden hearth of bohemian culture, a “beatnik” enclave years before the term was born or needed, and later a party spot for famous freaks. Scores of sculptors, sex rebels, stars and seekers lived in or visited the spot over the decades, including Gary Snyder, Dizzy Gillespie, John Handy, Alan Watts, Neil Young, Tom Robbins, Catherine McKinnon and the colorful prostitute activist Margo St. James. Too anarchic and happenstance to count as a commune, Druid Heights became what Gidlow jokingly called

“an unintentional community:” a vortex of social and artistic energy that bloomed out of nowhere, did its wild and sometimes destructive thing, and, for the most part, moved on.

Gidlow initially shared the property with a man named Roger Somers and his wife Mary, the couple who had actually found the place. A visionary house builder and jazz musician, Somers moved to Marin in 1950 and was one of the more breathtaking bon vivants of that or any era. In his woodwork and design, Somers developed a flamboyant, organic, deeply Californian style influenced by Frank Lloyd Wright, Japanese architecture, and the twists and turns of living things. (He once met Wright by impersonating a busboy at a Florida hotel and bringing the master

SCORES OF SCULPTORS, SEX REBELS, STARS AND SEEKERS LIVED IN OR VISITED DRUID HEIGHTS OVER THE DECADES...

and his wife their breakfast.) Somers' most outlandish commission was a tour bus he built for Neil Young in the mid-'70s, a massive eleven dream machine festooned with teak siding, a roof-deck, and syrupy Art Nouveau appliqué. Young took it out on the road only a couple times; rumor has it that the bus now houses chickens on his Broken Arrow ranch.

The odd stanchion from Young's bus can still be found tucked away in some of Druid Heights' homes and structures, most of which were built or converted by Somers and a man named Ed Stiles. A custom furniture maker from the East Coast, Stiles first tracked down Somers in the early '60s after seeing a photograph of him and a bare-breasted Mary in an sensationalist article on the California scene in *Esquire*. Somers invited the young artist to live at Druid Heights and install his shop in a building there in exchange for giving Somers access to his woodworking tools. For his commercial work, Stiles favored South American hardwood, and built furniture for churches and local figures like Graham Nash. (A music stand he built in 1968 was included in a Bay Area design show at SFMOMA.) But like Somers, Stiles also enjoyed working with salvaged materials; for his homes and workshops, he let the lumber before him organically guide his hand rather than following plans—or building codes.

One time Stiles used a redwood industrial process tank and a modified flash boiler to construct a hot tub. He opened it up to everyone at Druid Heights, and one day he came by to discover a nubile Judy Collins soaking away. "I thought of it as a good thing," he says with a smile. Another visitor was a local dentist who commissioned Stiles to build an improved model in his backyard, which is how the first full-time, filtered, self-regulating Marin County redwood hot tub was born. Stiles built about thirty tubs over the years, but when demand sky-rocketed after a 1971 *Sunset* magazine article appeared, he chose to retire.

"I wasn't interested in it as a business. I thought tubbing was an important social phenomenon. When people get naked together, they no longer carry the pretensions of their careers or identities. It was a great equalizer."

Throughout the late '60s, Stiles

thought he had died and gone to heaven, having found a creative and visionary community that sustained itself far from the workaday world. But things grew darker in the '70s. A family guy who was never into drugs, Stiles was increasingly bummed out by many of the colony's revolving cast of characters. One resident, who engineered the device that injected LSD into the gelatin squares of Clearlight acid, was surrounded by a loose circle of cronies that included a particularly paranoid Viet Nam veteran. At one point this fellow took to hunkering down in the hills at night, armed to the teeth and scanning for narcs and little green men from Mars.

"I enjoy weirdness," Stiles says. "People stoned on acid, jumping up and down on cars, naked? I didn't mind that. Guys with semi-automatic weapons, false IDs, and tons of ammunition? That I minded."

Angry and depressed, Stiles almost left the community. Then Somers himself got ripped off. His money, his cherished reed instruments, and the stash he kept in a World War II ammunition box was gone. "After that, he shut down the bullshit," says Stiles.

Another complicating factor during the '70s was the US Forest Service, which upset Druid Heights' natural social balance—i.e., shared bohemian poverty—by making deals with the various owners in order to buy them out. "It functioned well until the Forest Service came around and there was money available," Stiles

says. "Then everybody started to fend for themselves."

Today, Stiles and his wife are the only members of the old guard still holding down the fort. The hot tub is now a crenellated ruin crumbling into the hillside behind the renovated commercial chicken barn he lives in—Stiles has a lifetime lease on this funky weathered jewel of a home, but in the eyes of the Interior Department, the handful of other folks who still live at the Heights are borderline squatters. Few of the buildings are built to code, and it remains to be seen whether the Forest Service plans to tear them down or preserve them. Stiles isn't sure what is worse: the destruction of Druid Heights, or what he fears will be "a beatnik Disneyland." For the moment, the community shuffles on, a sober shadow of its former self.

Gidlow died at home in 1986, and her ashes were mixed with rice and buried under an apple tree. Somers lived there until 2001, when he passed away in his redwood hot tub, soaking alone just two days after 9/11. Stiles nurses complicated feelings about the man who so enriched his life but who also caused him a lot of grief. "He absorbed all the oxygen for a mile around him. And he was so charming he could get away with it." Most of all, Stiles expresses admiration. "He was the only person I ever knew who just didn't buy it. He never accepted the whole bullshit society thing. He rejected what you were supposed to do, whether it was about sex or food or architecture. He was beyond a rebel. He just made up his own

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rules as he went. He didn't lie, he just followed his own rules."

You can sense Somers' spirit in much of the architecture of Druid Heights, especially an exuberant round home known as the Mandala. Stiles built the bare bones of the place for Gidlow's sister, and it was heavily modified by Somers after Alan Watts commandeered the place. Despite its mystic name, the blobular, radial structure looks a bit like a clown from the hillside behind it, a resemblance that Somers claimed was intentional. "Most people live in a box," he would say. "I live in a clown's head." Somers tricked out the interior with ingeniously embedded lights, dragon glass, skylights, and a dining table sunk into the plush carpet floor for maximum comfiness. Outside the wall-like front windows lies a redwood deck where San Francisco's notorious Mitchell Brothers once shot a porno starring the foxy Annette Haven.

Sexual experiment was only one of the colony's means of exploring the boundaries of consciousness. One of the most charming structures on the land is a simple meditation shack that juts out from the hillside. The irregular clapboard shingles resemble seismic graphs, while the mitered windows pop out like quartz crystals or eyes agog with vision. The snug interior features Japanese wallpaper and a ceiling covered with bamboo slats, and it almost demands quiet contemplation. The shack was built by men long gone, but its Pacific Rim twist was first established at Druid Heights by Somers, who built an amazing shoji room inside the farmhouse that served as his first home on the property. A raised platform surrounded by paneled screens that Somers made out of cheap fiber-glass material rather than rice paper, the graceful and inviting zendo-like space once featured a buddha and kamidana, or ancestral shrine. During the summer, sunlight pierces a large telescoping round window to the north, which is crossed by two thin wooden shelves that resemble wispy clouds. Here Alan Watts gave lectures on Zen aesthetics; here Tom Robbins cavorted with groupies for all to see.

If there was a spiritual force behind the hedonism of Druid Heights it came from the East, from the sly immediacy

of Zen and the earthy anarchism of the Tao. Already in the mid-'60s, Gidlow was studying Chinese and calligraphy at San Francisco's American Academy of Asian Studies, a groundbreaking center of East-West exchange and a seedbed for the hybrid hippie forms of Zen, Taoism, and Hindu Vedanta to come. In the '60s, the Beat poet and Zen practitioner Gary Snyder lived at the Heights with his Japanese wife Masa, while barefoot monks from the San Francisco Zen Center's nearby Green Gulch farms would occasionally tramp over for a visit. Stiles, who had no interest in religion or Japanese architecture, was nonetheless responsible for carving a rosewood staff for Shunryu Suzuki, the legendary roshi of the Zen Center. Even the land itself seemed unrolled from some Chinese scroll, with its gnarled cypresses and a craggy rock in the distance dubbed "Cloud Hidden."

The rock got its name from Watts, the most illustrious spiritual hedonist associated with Druid Heights. An ordained Episcopalian priest, Watts moved to the Bay Area in 1951 to teach at the AAAS, where he may have met Gidlow. With his seminars, KPFA radio shows, and books, beginning with 1957's *The Way of Zen*, Watts coaxed countless hip and literate Americans into the deep stream of East Asian art and mysticism. Emphasizing perception and spontaneity rather than formal practice, Watts painted a picture of the Tao that was fresh, resonant, and countercultural avant la lettre. By experiencing the Way or the "suchness" of things, Watts claimed, we can temporarily shed our "skin-encapsulated ego." This expansion of consciousness reveals the larger ecological reality of which we are always already a part. Such insights also deconstruct the social programming we take to be our personalities.

Today Watts' writings and recorded talks still shimmer. But though Watts took the Beatniks to task for their druggy, rebel Zen, he himself did not exactly behave like the sober spiritual master many took him for. A notorious womanizer and hardcore alcoholic, Watts embodied the full contradictions of the countercultural seeker, a boundless and excessive spirit who sailed beyond the boundaries of conventional morality. Though he wrote frankly about the

need to balance mysticism and sensuality—to be "both angel and animal with equal devotion"—his hymns to spontaneity can sometimes seem like justifications for license and his own lax engagement with formal spiritual practice. When Stiles met him, the Brit was deeply in his cups, spouting obscene limericks. "I liked him immediately." But Stiles was also astonished at the amount of alcohol Watts consumed. "I asked myself how can anyone consume a fifth of vodka every day and live." When the middle-aged Watts died in the Mandala in 1973, Stiles had his answer: you can't.

Druid Heights was the place Watts went to unwind, his spiritual home turf. You can sense the jaw-dropping beauty of the place in his classic *The Way of Zen*, when he describes the essential aimlessness of the Tao as a kind of natural freedom:

the freedom of clouds and mountain streams, wandering nowhere, of flowers in impenetrable canyons, beautiful for no one to see, and of the ocean surf forever washing the sand, to no end.

Watts dedicated his autobiography to Gidlow and 1962's *The Joyous Cosmology* to the people of Druid Heights. The latter book, a slim volume subtitled "Adventures in the Chemistry of Consciousness," was Watts' *Doors of Perception*: a limpid and profound description of a group of friends—including "Ella" and "Robert"—all exploring the "goal-less play" of LSD. The same year, Watts holed up with Somers and some other hepcats and recorded the astounding tribal freak-out LP *This Is IT*, which includes Somers and Watts performing spontaneous voodoo scat over bongos lucidity [See sidebar on page 31].

In the early '70s, Watts decided he wanted his own library at Druid Heights, but when Stiles saw the austere and expensive Japanese box Watts wanted to build, he convinced him to try out a round structure instead. Somers drew up the blueprints, adding his characteristic panache, and a young man living onsite built it for a fraction of the estimate on Watt's original library plans.

Looking like a large redwood hot





Alan Watts' library, aka the Moon Temple.

tub crowned by a sylvan UFO, the snug little pad sits on a redwood platform regularly pelted with sticky eucalyptus droppings. Sinewy posts on an interior balustrade show Somers' continued devotion to the tao of wood; Somers also used thin 2x3s for the side-nailed redwood deck. These did not just bring elegance; Somers also knew that, since the lumber shops had to split 2x6s to fill the order, you got less knotty, higher-quality wood without extra cost. After Watts died, some of his ashes were scattered outside, where a single weathered marker, crafted by Stiles, is sunk in the clay. Gidlow then dubbed the space the Moon Temple, and made it available to some of the lesbian writers who started flocking to Druid Heights in the '70s, during the golden age of goddess feminism.

Though Watts spent a good time living and partying at Druid Heights, his main Marin center of operations lay elsewhere. The *S.S. Vallejo* began life as a steam-powered paddle-wheel ferry, shuttling passengers between Vallejo and Mare Island before the Bay Area's bridges snuffed out the colorful era of ferry travel. After completing her final run in 1948, the *Vallejo* was abandoned in a Sausalito shipyard built by the Bechtel Corporation during World War II. There an exuberant Greek artist named Jean Varda found the vessel and purchased it with some fellow artists. The *Vallejo* became the nucleus of Sausalito's hard-scrabble houseboat hipster scene, which attracted scores of beats and bohos to the mud-flats north of town, where folks had been vacationing in their "arks" since the 1880s. Kerouac himself stayed on the boat, supposedly building a fence around the landing during one of his notorious alcoholic tears. Well into the 1990s, the *Vallejo* continued to house outlandish characters and host outrageous parties, and its current owner is an old friend of Timothy Leary's who played a major role in the glory days of virtual reality. A fabulous Lovecraftian account of the boat's recent renovation, by the strange visionary artist Steven Speer, can be found at <http://www.vallejo.to/stories/steve.htm>.

While he lived, Varda was the soul of the *Vallejo*. When he wasn't sailing, cooking, or enjoying the company of beautiful young women, he made colorful cubist collages and mosaics

Never Too Much, Always A Little Less

Erik Davis on the recently reissued recordings of Alan Watts' Zen talks, haiku poetry and other moments of intense perception.

Recently the good folks at Locust Music have seen fit to release three unusual Alan Watts recordings. Watts was a very social guy, and he hobnobbed with many Bay Area mavericks after moving to the region in the early '50s. One of these characters was Henry Jacobs, a pioneering musician, sound collagist and radio prankster whose oddball 1955 Folkways debut *Radio Programme no. 1: Henry Jacobs' Music & Folklore* was also recently reissued on Locust. That disc was culled, in spirit if not in fact, from the "Music & Folklore" show that Jacobs hosted on Berkeley's insanely forward-looking free-form radio station KPFA. Jacobs was a Pacific Rim kind of fellow—he played tons of international recordings on his show, and was married to a Japanese woman named Sumire Hasegawa. In the late '50s, he formed the Musical Engineering Association, a record label in Sausalito devoted to the sort of east-west fusions that characterized much of the budding California consciousness movement. MEA issued three albums from Watts, along with some recordings of S.I. "general semantics" Hayakawa; they also recorded commercials for Japan Airlines.

The first Watts record, *Haiku*, begins with a side-long lecture by the former Anglican priest about the relationship between Zen and haiku, the highly formalized Japanese poetic form of seventeen syllables. In his classy, comforting, tweed-jacket voice, Watts describes the "profoundly startling simplicity" that lies at the heart of both practices. The talk is a fine example of the sort of crystalline lectures that Watts could seemingly produce at the drop of a hat, often live on KPFA, and that still blow through the mind like a cleansing breeze. On the second side, Watts reads selected haiku, grouped according to the four seasons:

*Outside the window, evening rain is heard
It is the banana leaf that speaks of it first*

Following each selection, some Caucasian cats with Japanese instruments, including Jacobs, set off little improvised bursts of Japonica, not unlike the dramatic punctuations of a Takemitsu samurai soundtrack. Then Sumire Jacobs chants the poems in the original tongue. The contrast between Watts' calm, storytime tones and Sumire's witchy and Noh-esque sing-song is marvelous, although best listened to with full attention and a receptive state of mind. As Watts explains on the first side, the sparkle of haiku partly depends on the open mind of the listener. In contrast to the oversaturation of our contemporary mediascape, the message of haiku is, as Jacobs explained elsewhere, "mystery: never too much, always a little less."

Haiku sold decently. The intelligentsia were then fascinated with Zen, and the New York Times gave it a positive review. So MEA put out *Zen & Senryu*, a less successful but still worthwhile collection of Zen poems and satirical Senryu verse, drawn from Blyth's *Haiku* book and Zen texts by D.T. Suzuki, Nyogen Senzaki and Watts. The poems are delivered in the same format as the readings on *Haiku*. The collection includes some classics—almost Zen clichés at this point—but

some real gems as well:

*Even in the mind of the mindless one
Arises grief
When the snipe wings up in the autumn evening
Over the marsh*

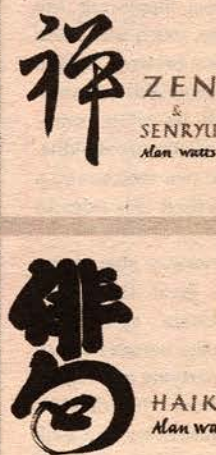
The second side of the disc represents a more wry and modern side of Japanese poetics. In the senryu poems, the attention to the thinness of ordinary life refocuses on the absurdity of ordinary life:

*The husband's toenail jumps into the sewing box
Overtaking and passing her
I saw that she was not much*

In the right space, these two Watts recordings go down like a cup of oolong tea in the late afternoon. *This is IT*, on the other hand, goes down like a bubbling vat of Haitian jungle juice cut with a fresh batch of Sandoz crystal. The origin of the recording, often pegged as the first aural document of psychedelia, seems to be a late-night free-association fest dedicated to nothing more than the pursuit and expression of The Ineffable Itness. Watts and Jacobs are joined by Druid Heights mainman Roger Somers, who drums and chants, as well as other hipsters, including percussionist William Loughborough, hitting and plucking congas, bass marimbas, and a lujon. On the surface level, the recording resembles an improvised bongo jam between beatniks with exotica leanings, with moaning mantras, shaman rattles, faux gagaku, and dribbling Afro-Caribbean beats. But just when you think things are just going groovy, some little nonsense ditty or stoner chant suddenly bristles into something ancient and enormous. The vocals of Watts and Somers are particularly intense, as words devolve into werewolf barks, demon coughs and windigo roars that are truly hair-raising. The contrast between Watts' guttural incantations and the erudite diction on the earlier MEA discs could not be stronger, but both modes are equally inspired, and equally expressive of the same quest for authentic spontaneity.

This is IT was recorded in 1962, at the peak of Watts' interest in LSD. The back cover copy quotes from *The Joyous Cosmology*, which was written the same year and features a thinly disguised account of tripping with Somers and Gidlow at Druid Heights. Given the historical context of the recording, and the surreal and incandescent mindmeld it captures, it is impossible not to regard *This is IT* as a documentary recording of an LSD session at a time when the meanings and routines of psychedelic experience were barely articulated. For this reason alone it is an exceptional recording. This is what freedom sounded like in Marin County, 1962, and it became the fountainhead and prophecy of so much freakiness, sonic and otherwise, to come. But the condition of their neurons doesn't really matter—on

"Fingernail Poem," Alan Watts may simply be drunk. What matters is the blast these mavericks send our way from the far fields that fringe our more mundane realities. In this way, *This is IT* achieves the goal of haiku: a moment of intense perception, the lightning strike we profane by thinking only that life is fleeting.



Haiku, Zen & Senryu and *This is IT* are available from Locust Music (www.locustmusic.com)



S.S. Vallejo, interior

out of textiles, wood, and other found materials. Varda's embrace of collage—a frugal art of scavenging and juxtaposition that compelled many postwar California artists—also remade the Vallejo. Varda painted its flanks with suns and pennants, hung colored bottles in the windows, and embedded shards of glass around the fireplace to catch the light.

In 1961, Watts and his wife Jano moved onto the *Vallejo*, taking over all but Varda's portion of the boat. Under the auspices of the Society for Comparative Philosophy, which also helped him hide his money from his ex-wives, Watts held Zen teachings and seminars in the loft-like space, including a combative 1967 gathering with Tim Leary, Gary Snyder, and Allen Ginsberg published in the Haight Street hippie rag *The Oracle*. At the time, much was made about the difference between Varda's outrageous decor and Watts' austere Zen interior, with its white walls, dark wood, and large bronze Buddha. But eventually the two men saw a doorway between their two sides to facilitate the flow.

For me, this doorway also opens into one of the great themes of California's bohemian spirituality: the endless interplay between sense and spirit, artful partying and higher consciousness. From the outside, this hedonistic spirituality can look like sloppy indulgence, or a deluded attempt to have your cake and eat it too. For all the profundity and wisdom of Alan Watts, one cannot help but wince at the paradoxes of his life and his lecherous alcoholic decline. For today's conservatives, who love to attack the permissive mores of the counterculture, such behavior is all the proof you need that

THE ANARCHY THAT EVENTUALLY UNDERMINED DRUID HEIGHTS AS A COMMUNITY ALSO ALLOWED ITS SPONTANEOUS CREATIVITY TO BLOOM.

going with the flow is a pact with the devil. Terrible and venal hypocrisies emerge from such law-abiding fears, of course, as well as a raft of resentment, but that's another story. The important question here is about gambling on spontaneous grace, and the courage involved in committing to energies outside the comforts of conformity, even when things may go awry—as they inevitably do. The anarchy that eventually undermined Druid Heights as a community also allowed its spontaneous creativity to bloom, a creativity that left its mark on some buildings and a handful of cultural artifacts, but whose incandescent play mostly passed away in the very moment of its blaze.

That very fleetness, it seems to me, is the abiding teaching of this place, and of the spiritual hedonists who lived there.

"Everything kept goes stale," Watts once said. Though Roger Somers left much of himself in his strange, amazing structures, he never considered their possible preservation. He just assumed, and perhaps even hoped, that his fluid forms would simply crumble away, merging into the stream of things just as the eucalyptus fades into fog.

Ⓔ

S.S. Vallejo





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BOMB POP

From war-torn Sri Lanka and the London projects, **M.I.A.** arrives a natural born star whose radical consciousness and proudly pan-ghetto sound have no easy origin. As the singer/MC explains to **Piotr Orlov**, it's both where she's from *and* where she's at. Photography by **W.T. Nelson**.

"The mask is the face."

—Susan Sontag, "On Style"

"I don't have a side, I'm spread out but I'm a mile wide/I got brown skin but I'm a west Londoner, educated but a refugee"

—M.I.A., "MIA"

Don't be fooled. Just because Maya Arulpragasam walks, talks and plays the part of a manufactured pop star-in-waiting with all the expertise of a Mickey Mouse Club graduate or a Danceteria regular, does not mean you've seen one like her before. And it ain't just her brown skin.

Like the kiddie popsters who've preceded her, the 28-year-old Sri Lanka-reared, London-educated singer/MC with the stage name M.I.A. has the girlie looks, the dance hooks and the backstory to entice mass appeal; simultaneously, she's created a border-crossing Now-sound that has endeared her to the underground merchants of Cool in the span of only three singles and one mix-tape. But what's most striking about Maya is her life diary—a mix of Third World civil war fatigue and immigrant struggle, First World art-school opportunism and hip-hop generation rebellion, self-taught savoir-faire and manipulative wiles—and how these experiences inform her songs. Coming at a time increasingly defined by fundamentalist "with us or against us" rhetoric, M.I.A.'s debut album *Arular* (released by the indie XL, but soon to be worked by the major label Interscope) is unabapologetic in questioning Western values and a refugee's relationship to them, which already makes it a welcome addition to the pop discourse.

Maya did not come by her "independent foreigner" stripes lightly. Born in London, she was six months old when her family moved back to Sri Lanka, a former British colony off the eastern coast of India recently in the news because of the tsunami catastrophe. Her father Arul Pragasam (the M.I.A. album title derives from his nickname) was a high-ranking soldier in the Tamil Tigers, a revolutionary army considered by many world organizations to be a terrorist group, and a leading participant in the 20 years-plus ethnic civil war between the minority Tamil Hindus and the majority Sinhalese Buddhist government. (Maya's relationship with her father has been limited to a handful of interactions in her lifetime.) She fled Sri Lanka's persecution-by-association along with her mother and sister, returning to public housing poverty in England in the late '80s. But as immigrants are wont to, Maya excelled in both her education and local subcultural pursuits, landing in the film program at London's prominent Central

St. Martin's College of Art & Design, a school equally lauded for its list of creatively minded alumni and derided for a student body heavy in slumming young intelligentsia. Soon after graduation, Maya gained notoriety for turning a film project gone awry into an exhibition of political stencils titled 'M.I.A.' which got her nominated for Britain's Alternative Turner Prize. A subsequent project to film the tour of Brit-pop band Elastica brought her together with that band's singer Justine Frischmann and sexually explicit Canadian rapper/producer Peaches, both of whom set Maya off on a life of creating her own beats and writing songs.

On *Arular*, where she's aided and abetted by a string of first-rate producers (mash-up pop king Richard X, British industry insiders The Cavemen, Philadelphia DJ supremo Diplo), her experience takes musical form. On first listen, it hardly sounds like an easily marketable commodity. The album flashes a cool rhythmic style that touches upon numerous global hip-hop and electronic forms (American crunk, Rio's *baile funk*, Kingston dancehall, the budding East London genre called grime, a Anglo-centric mix of rap and post-ragga jungle street knowledge) without expressing a natural bloodline to any of them. Instead, it's a hook-filled, populist backdrop for first-person assertions on self-empowerment through hip-hop ("Fire Fire"), self-empowerment through sexual assertion ("10 Dollar," "Hombre"), Swedish syndrome daydreams directly out of Ann Patchett's "Bel Canto" ("Amazon") and constant reappraisal of her refugee status.

A conversation with Maya is akin to her rambunctious lyrical style and freewheeling fashion sense: a single question elicits numerous responses, and even more asides, as though she can't help but get all of this information out of herself this—very—instant! On the one hand, she's perpetuates the same stereotypical worries that strike girls worldwide (is she putting on weight while in New York, the setting of our first conversation, three days before the 2004 Presidential election). On the other, she's voicing disorientation from the new American otherness (manifesting itself in her description of numerous portly, milkfed middle-aged Anglo men as "resembling George Bush") and admiration of pop-art subversives (especially Bill Drummond, whose chart-topping, cultural-prankster career as a member of acid-house charlatans KLF is one reference point of reference for M.I.A.'s strategy for taking on pop format).

On record and on the mic, Maya Arulpragasam speaks in radical tall tales, some of which are true! Personally, I can think of nothing more that I want out of a pop star.



KIDDIE-POP IN SRI LANKA

Arthur: Were you creative growing up?

M.I.A.: As a kid in Sri Lanka, I'd sit in a corner and draw away. In school, while the other kids were learning alphabet, I'd draw images for them, like 'a for apple.' So by the time I was 4-5 years old art was part of my personality. My family would say 'She's going to be an artist,' even though in Sri Lanka nobody wants to be an artist. It's not considered a profession, but something you do when you're a little bit stupid, and dumber than the rest. It's a hobby.

Did you have music to listen to there?

Yeah, pop music, but all I had was Boney M and Michael Jackson cassettes. I was really good at dancing. People hired me to dance at their kids' birthday parties. Sometimes, when my uncles would get really drunk and come home at 2 in the morning and had no entertainment, they would wake me up and make me dance. I was like 6, but if I wanted to stop, they'd throw things at my feet, and threaten to hit me. My mother would cry, 'Please let her go.' [laughs] Her brothers were quite rowdy. They'd wave her away laughing and I'd have

"HIP-HOP HAD EVERYTHING FOR ME THAT OTHER ART FORMS DID NOT: CONTENT AND STRUGGLE."

to dance for four hours straight. This happened all the time. Everybody just knew that I was good at it. I was like a singing dancing monkey, much smaller and darker than everybody, and when I danced, there was a really serious expression on my face.

Did other people you knew take music as seriously?

No. But our village only had one telly—small, black and white—and we would hire the video once a month. Everyone would get around in one house and spend all day and all night screening films. People would get ice water—this was a big thing too, cause there was just one fridge in the village—so that when the films screened, people would put ice water on their faces to stay up, cause it was such an important opportunity to see [the outside world/pop culture], you couldn't miss it.

Was there other Western music you heard in Sri Lanka?

We lived in a house in Colombo [the capitol of Sri Lanka] before we came to England, and that was the first time that I saw music videos on telly: Wham and Madonna and Paula Abdul and stuff. That was like, Oh my god there's so much out there.

HIP-HOP & RACE IN ENGLAND

How old were you when you first heard hip-hop?

I was about 10 when I came back from Sri Lanka to England, and we were living in a council flat, and that's where I first got into rap. When I would go to bed, I'd listen to the radio and dream about dancing and Paula Abdul and Whitney Houston, and that's how I fell asleep. Well, we got burgled and somebody took my radio while I was in bed. And [after that is when] I first heard hip-hop. There was a black boy lived next door. He was 19, really cool. I heard the bass lines coming through [the wall]. The first couple of days, I was like 'Shit, I really can't sleep.' One day, he was up blasting this music and his mates drove up, having a fag and chatting through the window. I had a look and they were just wicked, and I wanted to be a part of that. So I went round and started borrowing tapes, made friends with black girls who gave me more of an education into it. I started meeting Sri Lankans in England whose families lived in England all their lives, cousins that were into hip-hop. Me and my sister

thought they were so cool, living in a black neighborhood, wearing silk tracksuits, acting black, while I was wearing my polka-dot leggings. Within a year and a half of returning to England, me and my sister were both as black as you can get. My mom was like, 'Oh my god, what's happening?'

Why did you take to hip-hop so quickly?

It was the first thing that didn't make me feel like I had to know Shakespeare back-to-front to fit in. Plus, it was something new, which I knew about but other people at school didn't, something that gave me a sense of belonging, which I didn't have before. I didn't want to belong with the majority of people at school. I didn't want to strive to be like them because, being a refugee, I could never be that. But with hip-hop, I could wear these amazing [sneakers], dance like this and listen to music that had the best beat I ever heard.

Was it weird being Sri Lankan, and hanging out with black kids and acting black? I would figure there would be weird cultural repercussions regarding where you belonged and where you didn't...

I learned about the racial hierarchy from having to go to a special school to learn English, where you're lumped in class with other kids from around the world, and you figure out where you stand. But I never really had to pay attention [to black people]. Cause I didn't know English, and it was white people who were dominating my brain—"they don't like me cause they think I'm a Paki, what's that about?" So dealing with what black people thought about you was a whole other arena that I never even thought about. When I walked around the council estate back then, I would feel like we were scum of the earth. And compared to me, black people definitely had a sense of belonging in Britain. But it seemed that they didn't have a sense of belonging before the Asians got there. When we came over in the '80s, we were part of the first batch of Sri Lankan refugees, so the community was small and new, and it was low on the hierarchy. The Sri Lankans who had come before the war were people who came to study at Cambridge and Oxford, educated doctors and professionals. They were acclimated and sort of...white. They did not mix with refugees; even today they sort of look down on the refugee



Sri Lankans. So even within that community, there's a hierarchy. I'm sure now, with the Eastern Europeans coming over, [South Asians] have more of a sense of belonging. That said, when you come over you start from scratch: you're nothing, you don't have anything, you don't have self-worth. You could have been a doctor, but, no you're not going to come here and start doing your doctor thing—so you have to work with that. Maybe that's harsh and I just have to deal with it, but by the time you get to the West as a refugee, you are an immigrant broken by war.

So how did hip-hop let you rise above that?

I found understanding hip-hop a universal thing. Not just understanding the rhythm, how they danced, their style or their attitude; there was something else, beyond song structure and language. It works on a few basic human principles, in terms of what stimulation buttons to push. It had everything for me that other art forms did not: content and struggle behind it. And it's not necessarily a consciousness thing—it's a natural thing. And because I was able to adapt to it, hip-hop gave me a home, an identity. Before, people looked at me and thought 'Oh, she's a Paki refugee kid who doesn't know how to speak English.' Now they looked and said, 'Her trousers are so baggy, she's got bleach in her hair, her Walkman's on too loud.' These kinds of [bigotries] were easier to deal with. If you're alienated because of the type of music you listen to, it's okay because you have a tribe of people who understand it, and I knew that in little holes all over the world, there were kids picking up on that shit, joining the secret club. That's how you feel as a teenager. It was an outsider culture, for those who didn't have a sense of belonging in the mainstream. I was already used to that thinking, being a Tamil, a guerilla. Hip-hop was the most guerilla thing happening in England at the time. You had Public Enemy fronting it, and that felt like home, and I could dance while I was feeling shitty. It had a whole aesthetic to it—it was being really crass with pride.

Overcompensating for something you didn't have enough of?

Yeah. But if you watched it, and you walked away with five percent of that, it was plenty. And it was total rebellion to all the Sri Lankans. Whether they were refugee or not, they couldn't handle it. I cut my hair really short, shaved in the back and stuff, and every time I did something like that it was considered taboo in the community. People at [St. Martin's] college didn't like me talking about



that kind of music either, or dressing it. They thought if I was going to be a serious filmmaker, I should wear Doc Martens, whereas I walked in with stilettos. I wasn't dressing like a b-girl all the time, but it was in my flavor. But they were too ignorant. Because if you were really noticing about how it was going on, you knew in five years, it would be everywhere. Instead people were really quick to shut things down. And now, in the past decade, hip-hop as an art form has achieved more than art as an art form has.

THE (MIS-) EDUCATION OF MAYA ARULPRAGASAM

On some level, you must have been an over-achiever to wind up at St. Martin's...

I didn't have grades to get into St. Martin's; I just totally emotionally blackmailed the head of the Art department, told him that I'd be a hooker if they said no, and they let me in.

Wait, what?

I was in America with my cousins so I missed all my university [applications] and didn't get into any universities. But I really wanted to study art and the only place I wanted to go is St. Martin's cause it's the best one [in England], and I didn't have any qualifications. So I got the name of the head of the art department and just rang him up every single day at, like, 1:37pm, just as he was biting into his sandwich: 'Hi, this is Maya, I really have to go there!!!' He laughed at me and put the phone down, telling me how 16,000 people apply for 20 places, go through six interviews to get in, that you can't just waltz in. I told him, I'm not going to go study anywhere else, so I'm just better off becoming a hooker, [laughing] that I'd rather do anything than compromise my education. Nothing he told me could turn me away. So eventually he let me in. it was just too funny. He said I've got chutzpah, and may be the person to change something about their institution was someone who had chutzpah, because everyone else conformed and filled out the application form six times to get into an institution that was supposed to teach people about becoming unconventional. He thought that compared to how everyone else got in there, I was what the institution needed.

So you were successful in that?

No. By the time I left St. Martin's, I could not justify myself being an artist at all, because I did not meet anyone there who was doing interesting art that was also getting through to everyday people. [Students there were] exploring apathy, dressing up in some pigeon outfit, or running

around conceptualizing. My life did not allow it: My mom was getting evicted, my brother was going to jail, I'd get my first phone call from my dad in 12 years confirming he's still alive. So making ripples in the water, to aesthetically represent beauty, just didn't make sense [to me].

So was your art experience a total bust?

No, no. I was really interested in a lot of things at the college. I just wasn't so stuck in the film and fine art thing. I had friends in the fashion department, friends in graphics and friends in advertising, and it was interesting to see what other people were doing. The fashion courses at St. Martin's were exciting because the whole fashion thing was really disposable and moving really fast. Whereas in film, we were still working with [texts from] the 1970s, lecturers coming in to talk about being black, gay, or feminist in Britain and how that felt. I could not take it anymore. I thought: 'Why don't you go out and do something exciting and break all those stereotypes? Don't teach us to whine about our problems, tell us to be excited about trying to solve our problems.' At least then you can energize the audience. I thought it was a simple idea, that's why I'd always take the piss out of things in my films, which they thought too light. Instead, they had students who were all so serious about what they were doing, not mixing with others because no one was clever enough, making films for the intelligentsia that only 30 people would get to see at the [Institute of Contemporary Art], dealing with old theories that no one was updating to make relevant for our lives. It missed the whole point of art representing society. Social reality didn't really exist there; it just stopped at theory.

Which is the exact opposite of an immigrant's life...

The week I graduated, I got a phone call that my cousin had just died in Sri Lanka. He was kind of my twin: we were the same age, same month, we'd always have our birthday party together, he's the one who made me how tomboy-ish I am. He joined the Tigers and he died. That day I was like, 'Oh my gawd, I've just come out of college with a fine art degree.' It made no sense. Then I got another word that he was still alive, but was brain-dead at some hospital. So I went to find him. It was my first trip back to Sri Lanka since I left, and being that I'd got a film degree, I wanted to make a film about it—called 'MIA.' It was hardcore, because pretty much everybody I met never had access to the press before, and they had so many raw stories and stuff. Yet I couldn't do anything with it 'cause it was Tamil.

"I'M 100% SRI LANKAN, I'M PISSED OFF, I DIDN'T HAVE A STABLE LIFE, AND I'M A REFUGEE. YET I'M NOT OUT THERE DOING FUCKED UP THINGS TO PEOPLE, I'M JUST TRYING TO MAKE PEOPLE DANCE AND CLAP THEIR HANDS."

It was loads of Tamil people talking about what had happened to them for 15 years, and how fucked up shit was there, because of the PTA [Prevention of Terrorist Act, a 1979 Sri Lankan law passed at the onset of Civil War in that country], which allows shoot-to-kill of anyone suspected of being a terrorist. And since terrorists don't have uniforms, everyday people who want to stand up are cast as a terrorist and they're getting killed. So a whole youth culture there had gone missing. I went there and filmed it. I wanted to make a young beautiful thing about what had happened to my cousin and to all my other cousins who were still alive, cause that's what I had a connection to. Rather than make a youth culture film in England, it was going to be what a market-stall kid in Africa or India or Sri Lanka experiences today. But when I brought 60 hours of footage back to England, 9/11 just happened and it was considered propaganda material for the Tamils, who are just considered blanket terrorists these days. I could do nothing with it. So I took single frames from them and made them into disposable fashion-y wallpaper and stencils, working off a need to be instant and immediate, to get this out right now. It was boring and ugly. But it was done in pretty colors, so people didn't know what I was talking about. That was done as M.I.A. as well, which kind of stood for my name. And I got nominated for the Alternative Turner prize as a graffiti artist, and the only girl doing it in England. It was about a month or two after my show that I sat down at the four-track and the first song I wrote was called 'M.I.A.'

REFUGEE MIND-STATE

Do you identify with all the grime coming out of East London, or The Streets?

Dizzee [Rascal] and those guys are really good, and I think Mike [Skinner a.k.a. The Streets] does very well, cause he's a storyteller. But I feel like I have too much in my head to be good at that. I'm always pulled in a thousand different directions. Eventually, when someone gives me a microphone, I go 'Blahhhh...Ommm.' [laughs] I get Zen off this, totally lost. I don't have a place.

How do you deal with that placelessness?

What you can do is have fun while you're traveling and make traveling as comfortable as possible, cause that's all you got for the rest of your days. And if I'm going to just hop from place to place, from thing to thing, looking for somewhere to belong, then I might as well have fun with it, rather than bitching, moaning and striving to stay put and having that 9-5 life which I never signed up for.

I'm trying to find a new way to be. And the more communication I have with people, the more I find out it's quite common nowadays, no matter who you are and where you come from. Maybe that's the way we're all like these days: placeless. And that makes me feel better—makes me feel I'm actually more commercial, more pop [laughs]—than I thought. That it's not some freak notion, but a real common idea.

Look, I'm 100% Sri Lankan, I'm pissed off, I didn't have a stable life, and I'm a refugee, like a lot of people on the planet today are. 'You've never had one of them before, so deal.' I'm the antithesis to whatever someone like Norah Jones is doing. There were no rules how I got here. Yet I'm not out there doing fucked up things to people, and none of my songs is depressed. I'm just trying to make them dance and clap their hands [laughs].

Free your ass and your mind will follow...

I was thinking that if I was working at some market store selling fish—in Africa, or Sri Lanka or Papua New Guinea, or wherever—then I would still want to have [my music] on the radio, not really scrutinize the lyrics and still get something out of it. Most of those people don't understand English anyway.

Is there a single point you're trying to get over?

Honestly, I don't know a lot of my lyrics—often I make 'em up on the spot.

So they're coming out of your gut as opposed to being thought-out declarations...

Yeah, people think that I have to have one point of view, but I don't. I have a sentence in every song that





is what I'm trying to say, and the rest is just...whatever. But if there is [a main point], I think it should be about eccentric human beings, the kind I don't see enough anymore. Watch the ads on the telly, they tell you that buying clothes or a mobile phone is supposed to change your life, make you a happier person. But all these things are just making everyone the same. I want to see the spirit of people, and I don't know where to find it. I think when I did the yelling bit on 'Galang,' that was what I was thinking at the time, 'I'm just gonna do this, and see if I'm brave enough to just let it run for a minute and a half of this song, even though I can't really sing.' I couldn't sing that part, it was just me yelling, and the producers are like 'you're not singing it in key,' and I was like 'I don't know what a key is—please explain to me what a key is?' It is what it is. Most people would just put it down to me being lazy. But at the same time, I don't want [that perfection]. I started doing it because I wanted to know what would happen if you just get a random person to just show their spirit. Because, if when I was 16 someone said I would be a pop singer, I would have thought that I'd be getting my nails done, wearing Gucci. Now that I'm here, I'm thinking it's counterproductive. Being comfortable with yourself is far more important.

That sounds like a learned lesson.

Look, when I was taking photographs and making films, the people that I found really amazing were those people who were sitting on the bus, people who had something but couldn't really do anything with it in the world, because they strove for the stereotype that was sold them, even if it took away from them being happy. A lot of poor people—a lot of refugees—get taught the wrong lessons by the modern world, and they have to live with those lessons forever. They don't come across things that question or show them different views of some parts of this world, 'cause their sight is limited. I think I'm really lucky to have hustled my way through it, and met people along the way who have opened my eyes to certain things. It was down to me to take it in, or not take it in. Now I feel like I can turn around and tell other refugees they're actually great, and how there are [Westerners] who'll pay a lot of money to have the kind of shit that they got, so they should be proud of it. Because refugees are good at making stuff 'cause it's all made at home, and we're poor. We can't afford art.

So, right now: do you feel like you are Sri Lankan, British, or other?

Oh my God, that's hard. All of the

above, because then I can have a more fulfilled life by trying them all.

But that also means never defining who you are.

It's true, but that is exactly what I want to be comfortable with. If I knew that I could be any of these—British, Sri Lankan, or Papua New Guinean in the next 10 years—I'd just accept it and I'd deal with it. But it won't happen. So I'm going to have to learn how to make the most of that. Which is my whole point: making the most out of whatever happens to you.

SELF-ACTUALIZATION IN THE NEW WORLD

So you must have met people whose examples put you on this road...

When I was 16, I saw this guy who to this day is the only Sri Lankan to become an artist in England. He came on this BBC program called *Tomorrow's World* which was all about new technology. Condi basically invented a way to recreate the Sistine Chapel, using graphic design and printers, a breakthrough kind of project. And I was like, 'Wow he's Sri Lankan, I wanna be like him.' Now I had someone to point at and say he's done it. It was only at that point my mom understood that my being an artist was a possibility, and that I may not become a doctor.

[Elastic singer] Justine Frischmann was another. When I met Justine for the first time, I'd gone through life completely confident with what I knew. I had friends that took me to really expensive restaurants and amazing parties. If I went to L. A. [to visit my cousins], I could hang out with rappers, cause at that time I was really girly, dressed nice, did whatever it took to get into places and I learned lots of things. Justine was the first person I met who I wanted to grow up and become like, someone with a lot of personal issues and crises, but [who was] also really generous and focused. She has spent her life meeting established people and artists who she tries to learn from. I'm the same, but I had been looking for knowledge in really random places. I would go hang out in a prison one weekend and ask them where they went wrong, then spend a night with some crackhead and whatever, figuring shit out. Justine would never push the boat out that far. So when we met, it was total opposites. I was really fucking poor, and she's really rich. I was really creative in lots of things—making work everyday, painting, film, photographs—but I couldn't stand still in one spot to focus. She had loads of focus but didn't have the drive. She had private education and

(continued on page 69)

Justine Frischmann's Dinosaur Jr.

3 classic Albums



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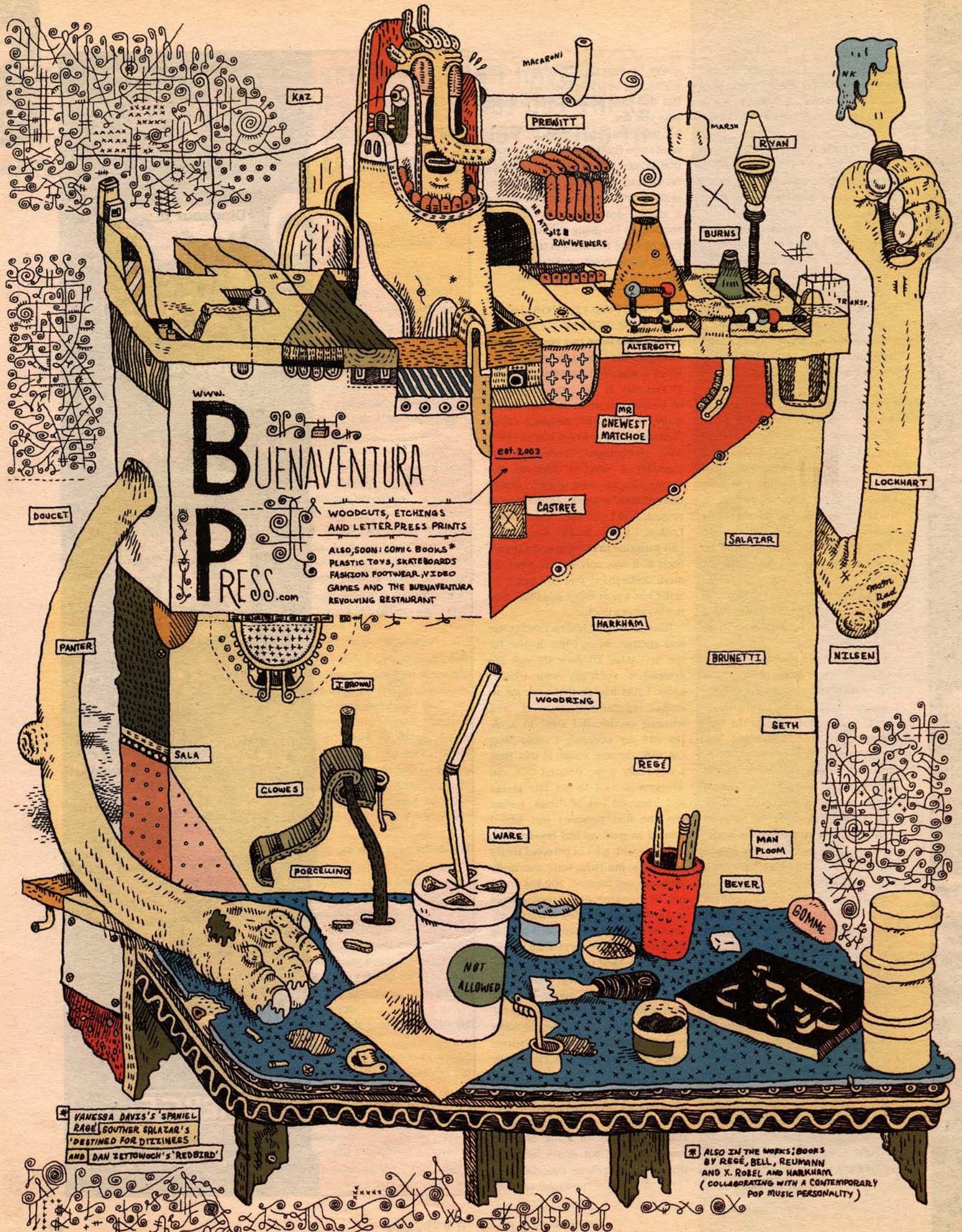
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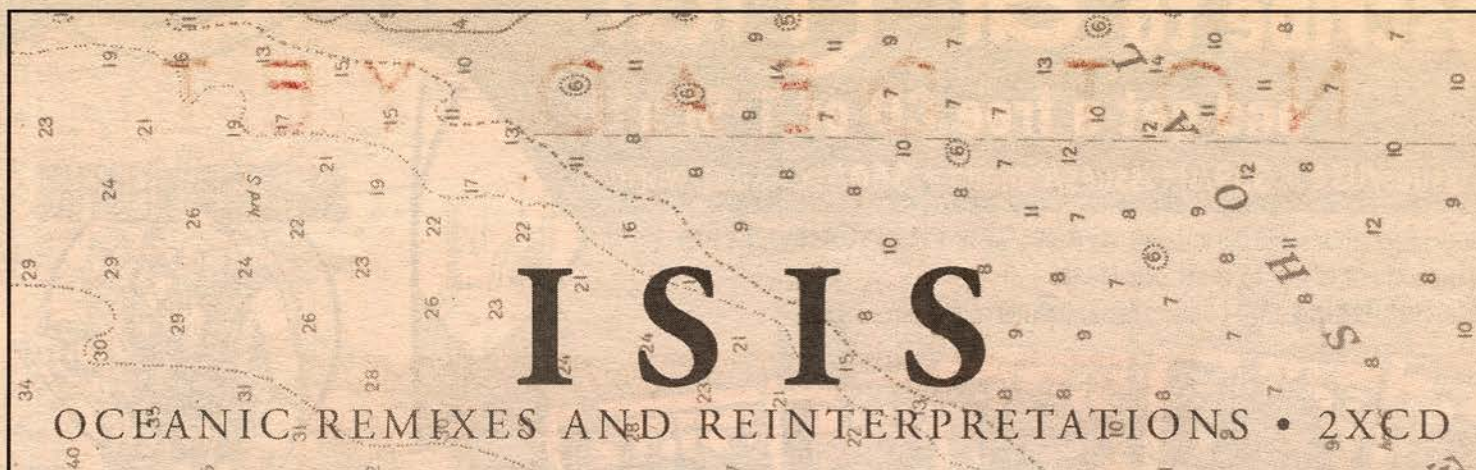
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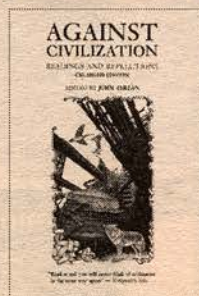
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NOT DEAD YET

Catching up with Scandinavia's black metalists.
Photography and interviews by **Stacy Kranitz**



Nattefrost (standing), Carpathian Forest vocalist
Oslo, Norway

"The book is better than the movie."

So reads the litany of Fenriz from Darkthrone, living totem of Norwegian black metal, walking wounded for a war waged with full heart against a world of indescribably stupid life-destroyers. So tired of fighting against you, me and himself, he repeats his simple wisdom: black metal is a personal vendetta. Every parcel of its magic is bound to the music. The live show, the interviews—even the following photographs—are simply an opportunity for disillusionment.

Fifteen years after the first blaze in the northern sky, the fire of black metal wanes in Norway. Even Norwegians tell church-burning jokes. Yet the following sons of northern darkness parade uncomfortably in sacred war paint before the cameras like captured Native American chieftains, trapped between fearsome cliché and buffoonery. As the descendents of Geronimo, the heirs of black metal struggle to connect with their earth spirits—in this case Wotan, Bathory and Mayhem. They clench their warhammers and sway with insecurity beneath the spirits of 1993, when simple heavy

metal mania reanimated repressed national fantasies, so that possessed children burned churches and struck out with knives to avenge pagan Norway's massacre by bloodthirsty invading Christian treasure-hunters over 1000 years before.

"In Oslo we see Fenris of Darkthrone as the only one left, sitting in a pub drinking beer," writes Varg Vikernes, a tragic figure of 1993 for whom opportunity remains frozen in a cell block. For other survivors, the purity of the written word and the recorded song have become a commodity. The purity can be sold. The purity makes an excellent T-shirt. The purity is hilarious. The purity is almost safe—though Gaahl's recent violence convictions say otherwise. But external impressions and bad hair days be damned; from the the lowest worms to the highest ravens, black metal breeds among spiritual beings. What unfurls to the flesh in public is imperfect and filled with idiosyncrasies. In private—and probably much nearer to you than Norway—the pages continue to turn.

—Ian Christie

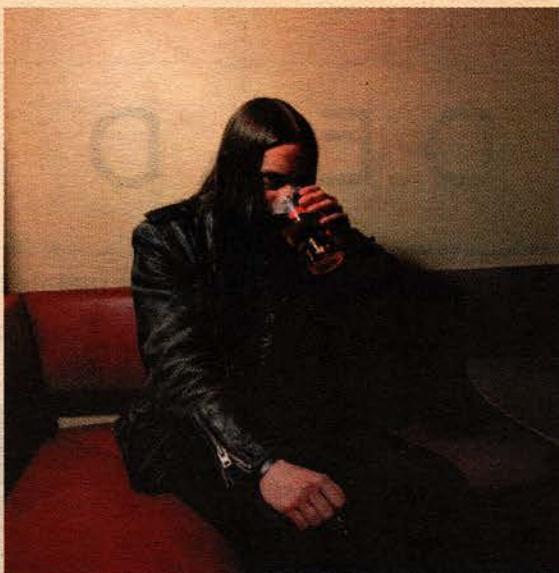


Nicolas (Kvarforth) and Alex (Inisis) of Shining
Halmstad, Sweden

Nicolas: We have two different parts in today's black metal scene. The first is this underground thing where they release their albums in limited editions in 666 copies. They believe that remaining true is to be as inaccessible as possible.

The other part is what we are doing. I want to function as a guru. Harass yourself, support negativity altogether. One side of me begs for this negativity, does everything for it, serves it. And at the same time I hate it, because of course no one wants to feel like shit. But that's the whole beauty part of it.

Alex: Black metal is shit to me—music is shit to me—but I love it. It's hard to explain, but I hate everything in this world, almost.



Fenriz (Gylve Nagell), drummer of Darkthrone
Oslo, Norway

I look upon black metal as a truly global thing. It was just sort of a coincidence that several Norwegian bands laid emphasis on certain bands from the '80s. When we all started recording albums, we sounded really similar, and that made the "Norwegian sound." I've always felt that we were paying homage to Celtic Frost, Hellhammer and Bathory. In Darkthrone we never said we were trying to make an original style. In 1991 we did our first black metal album. At the time nobody was really listening to black metal. We did a black-and-white cover with a guy in corpse paint. Nobody had seen that for many years. People sort of freaked. We got some attention, although we didn't want attention because we sort of had the black metal feeling, like someone has the blues. Only, the black metal feeling is somewhat more obscure. Back then, I thought maybe 1500 people across the globe could understand the black metal feeling.



Hymr and Lindheim of Helheim
Bergen, Norway

Hymr: Hellheim is the realm of the dead, or so-called dead, in Norse mythology.

Lindheim: We would never had been writing about Norse mythology if we hadn't been playing in Norway. And of course we feel we have something to prove, being a black metal band from Norway. It's really hard competition. The bands you like the most are living in your neighborhood.

Hymr: I believe we really have something to add to the Viking metal genre.

Hymr: In the start, those years when we toured we used wool clothing, some of them more like Middle Earth, normal clothing from that time, and it was so warm on stage that you felt like fainting. When we saw the chainmail stuff, it felt much cooler, it felt more like the new style we wanted to have. It felt metallic if you know what I mean. We were like, okay who is going to have chainmail and who is not. Three of us wanted to use chainmail.

Lindheim: People are always impressed by Hymr because he plays drums with twelve kilos of chainmail.

Hymr: I'll probably quit that because sometimes it's really hard. But it does leave a good impression.



Frode Glesnes, guitarist-singer of Einherjer
Haugesund, Norway

Einherjer has to do with a Viking who fell in battle. When he reaches Valhalla he becomes "Einherjer." We chose the name because it fits very well into the lyrical concept of our band. Later we realized that we should have chosen a more international name because nobody can pronounce it.

It was '93 when we started, that's all I remember. We just wanted to play metal, really. We were 19 and 20. We wanted to both lyrically and musically capture the Viking feeling. The lyrics mostly deal with old Nordic myths. We try to associate metal with a few elements of Norwegian folk music. We try to create an atmosphere.

Our fans are the same people that listen to all kinds of extreme metal. We also have these more diehard Viking metal fans who are interested in more than just the music. In Norway, people do not want to do too much, but in Germany the fans come with these Viking spears. They have a completely different metal scene in the middle part of Europe.



Gaal, Gorgoroth singer
Bergen, Norway

I've been in bands since the start of the whole black metal scene. As long as it's been around, I've been a part of it. The music speaks for itself in many ways. It has an anti-Christian concept. The idea of the flock has always been something we're against. You represent Lucifer: the one that writes up his own part and finds his way.

The church and society are an opponent to you. The church is about controlling. It has nothing to do with God, they preach God even though they have nothing to do with God. Everything they base their values on is based on a lie. That is why we have to remove everything they have put into society. Because it is a plague. It's a sickness. To gain health and the moral wellness that lies within the individual, you have to remove everything that comes out of this plague, which is the church. I have no interest in talking to the listener. Because I don't want to put any words in other people's mouths. I want them to search for it instead of being given it right in the face. You're not out to preach to people. You're out to make them aware. You force them to search.

There are three different cases against me. One of them I am finished with. Now there's a new case, and then there's another one which has not been in court yet. It can be from nothing to fifty, whatever years. It depends on how bad they want the case to be the way they see it. At the moment the charge for the trial has not been in court. The police and authorities preach this satanic ritual idea. They have to prove it. We will see what happens.

It's been three years since we released the last album. To keep things going, we have to create and be potent. When you have ideas, you have to finish the ideas to get on with something new. So I put in an application to come out of the prison because I have been doing time for one of the episodes that I am charged with. And probably because of good behavior the boss in prison said, "I don't see any reason why I shouldn't let you go out to do it."

King ov hell, Gorgoroth bassist
Bergen, Norway

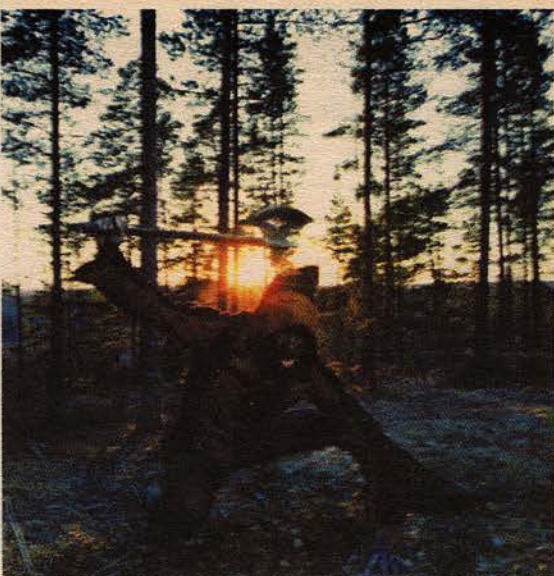
We try to create music that is worthy: Satan-worthy, chaos-worthy, atmospheric and at the same time brutal. The idea for the last record was to create an album without feeling, totally cold. It's very pure in this form. I think we have done that in a good way.



Nebelhexe (Andrea Haugen) of Hagalaz Runedance
Oslo, Norway

In 1994, I had this idea of having a cult magical organization dealing with northern magic, shamanism and since I was doing music, it kind of became more and more a music entity. In the end, it was only a way for me to express myself, to express my views, my feelings. It's dedicated to the spirit of ancient northern Europe. So in essence it's a way for me to get my views across and explore the realm of spirituality, gods and goddesses, the ancient art of magic, the nationalistic soldier and his trances, and the northern and Celtic worlds.

I think a lot of metal bands say, "Oh Vikings—cool, oh warriors and swords, Viking ships." My approach is much more mystical and magical because I practice it. I don't sing about Vikings even though I do sword fighting. I'm much more into the wisdom behind the myth.



Jyri Vahvanen, founding guitarist of Battlelore
Lappeenranta, Finland

First there were five of us, now there's seven members, but there's a dozen of people who help us do all these image things: make-up, clothing, our weapons and stuff like that. "Epic metal" bands like us are usually quite big, because everything is played live. We don't use any back-up tapes at all. Of course, we can't reach the same sounds as on the record but atmosphere is much more energetic on the stage than on the album. The album is much more feelings and mood and the live show is pure energy. My personal dream is for Battlelore to play with a symphony orchestra.

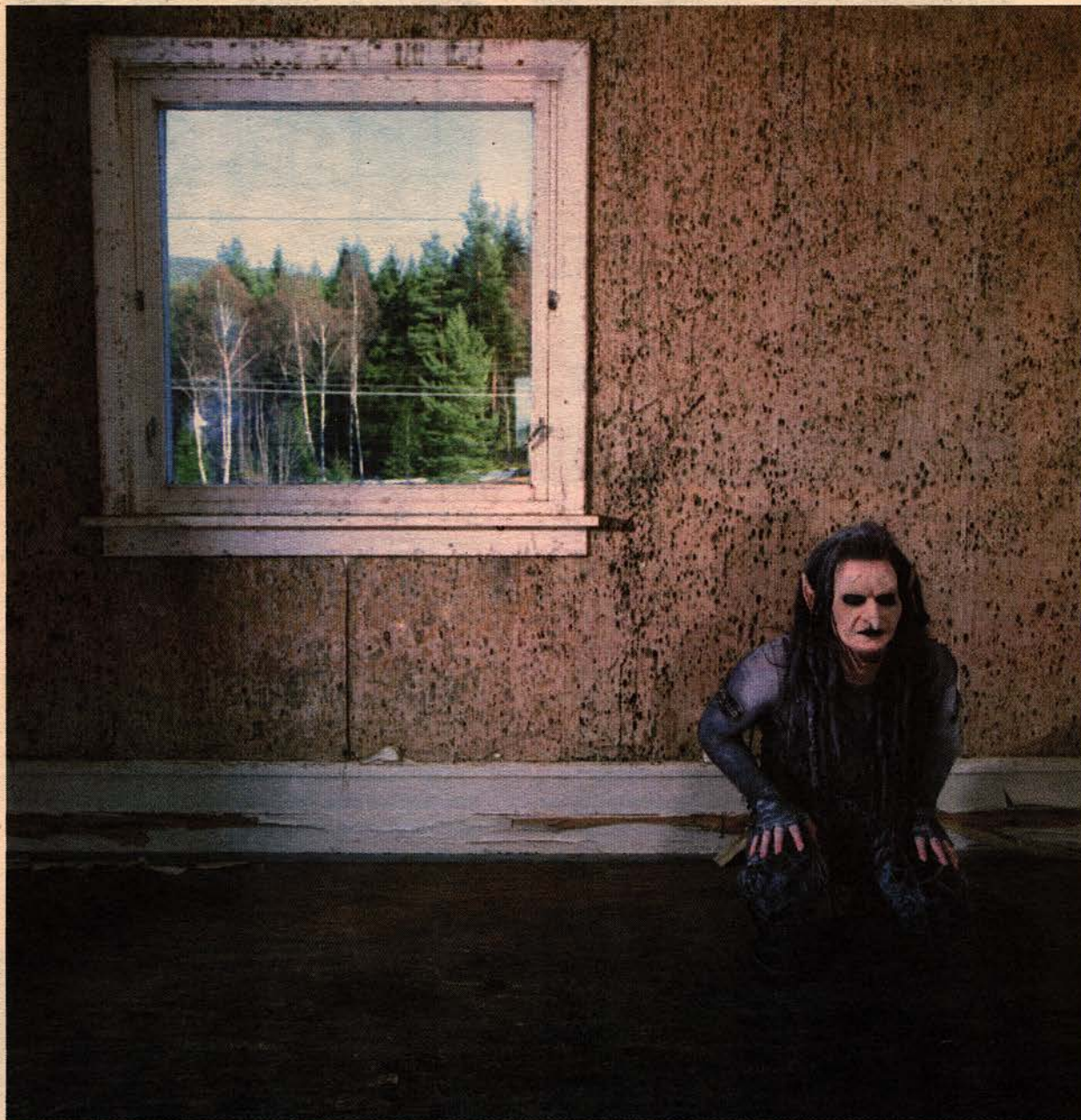
We try to be not a typical metal band that always sing about darkness and death. On our third album, there is going to be some metal about hobbits and that is quite a challenge because it's quite a happy and joyful theme. We'll see how it's going to work. There are going to be a lot of pure evil metal fans that will be like, 'You can't do that.' Well, why not?

Frost (right) and Satyr of Satyricon
City, Norway

Frost: [There used to be a medieval theme in our music.] It was the terror of those times. There was this constant feeling of terror and menace that was part of the everyday life, seeping into every cell of the body, from diseases to punishment brought on by people. There are the documented facts from history books, and there is what lies in the collective subconscious that [tells you] it was very much like that. That relates very much to black metal.

Satyr: Now we need to progress black metal on its own foundation, not move it into someone else's foundation. That's important. Black metal should be extreme. This is no vampire fairytale.





Mortiis

Notodden, Norway

I've been around for a long time and I've seen a lot of things come and go. The second wave of black metal started out in Scandinavia and Norway, in '91. It was very primitive. But very, very quickly keyboards were used. We got that element very fast, and then one or two years later you got a bunch of female vocals, which was a huge hit. Cradle of Filth did it a lot and a bunch of other bands started doing it. Then you got the whole Viking crap thing. Then all of a sudden Cradle was doing a vampire gothic blend. Then you don't know what's going on anymore. And in the last four years everybody is into death metal again.

I was asked to leave Emperor because I have a temper. I still have it, but it doesn't come out too much. When I was in Emperor I would have a lot of these tantrums. I don't think they wanted to deal with it. Who the fuck wants to? So I left the band in late '92. Ever since then I just kind of drifted away from the scene. I started Mortiis and all of this ambient shit.

Blasphemer (Rune Erickson), guitarist for Mayhem

Oslo, Norway

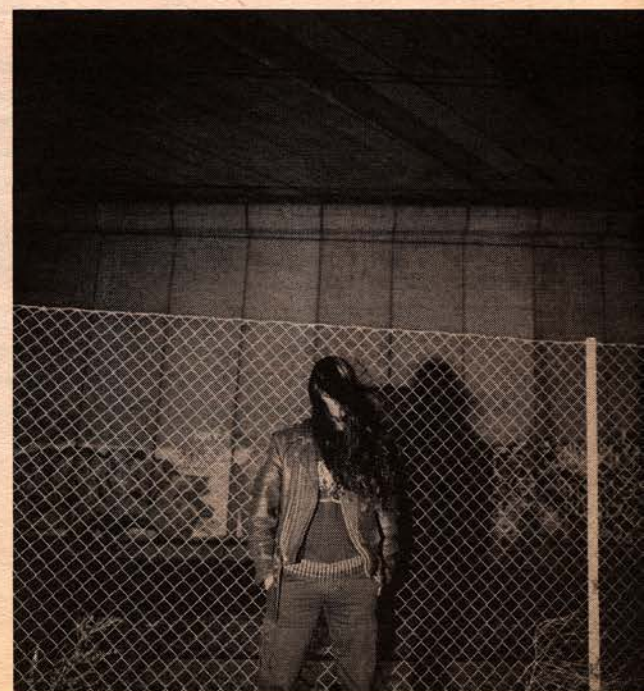
I don't feel like I'm in a band. I don't consider Mayhem as just a band. I feel like Mayhem is a way of living. It's so much more than a band. That's the difference between us and other black metal bands. Black metal doesn't belong in the limelight at all.

Black metal became a trend when the media focused on all the church burnings and the murder. People started to adopt other styles into black metal and that's how it got really really big. All of these bands came along and started to mix things and suddenly there was a good deal of melody in it and that made it so more people could tolerate it. But I think there are not a lot of bands that really believe in black metal and the values of black metal as they once were. In the early '90s, they were much more into the Satanic aspect of it. Now, it's a big media, money machine. People are getting really big and bands hit the charts. The ideology behind the music isn't that

important now. Black metal was a threat to society once but it isn't anymore.

We're not earning a lot of money. We're not earning money at all actually. The important thing is that we live it out. I am an idealist in a way: I won't be a part of society, I will live for my own thing, and I will do that to the fullest extent. And I guess you can call me 'Blasphemer' for the way I behave, the way I act and the way I think.

Ⓔ





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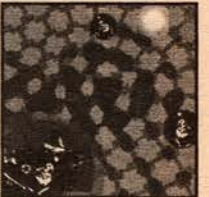
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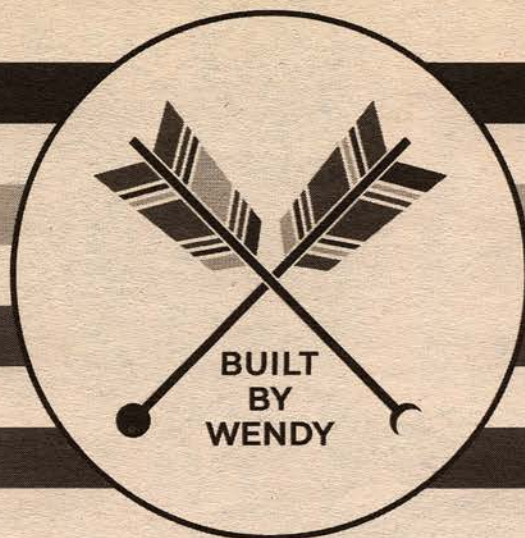
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FREEDOM ROCK

Reviews by John Payne

Magma
Kohntarkosz Anteria
(Seventh)

The Mars Volta
Frances the Mute
(Universal)

We all know the cliché about France, that it is incapable of producing Great Rock Music, a condition said to owe to the French language itself, which is, the thinking goes, too soft and nuanced to make the properly heavy rock impact. So it's ironic that France gave birth to one of the heaviest bands the rock world has ever known, and simultaneously not a rock band at all.

Magma was formed in Paris in 1969 by drummer Christian Vander, the stepson of French jazz pianist Maurice Vander. Christian had been playing jazz and pop professionally since his early teens—he received his first drum set from jazz trumpeter Chet Baker, who stole it from his drummer. Vander gathered players from all over the country who were dissatisfied with the typical French habit of slavishly copying American or British rock and jazz musicians. At the time, he says, "Everyone had flowers on their clothes, but I preferred to see flowers in the meadows." Magma dressed in black.

A raven-haired, powerfully built man of swarthy hue and wolfish glare, Vander was of a darkly cosmological bent, and had an early fascination with Gurdjieff. Musically, John Coltrane was his god, and Coltrane's drummer Elvin Jones made a big impact on Vander's multilimbed, badass drum style. Not wishing to play jazz, exactly—he still considers it a specifically black American art form—for Magma Vander drew on the folkloric music of his Polish Gypsy forebears. The band's signature sound evolved via chanting, guttural vocals and much use of repetitive motifs

pumped out on multiple acoustic and electric pianos and horns, atop militaristically hefty bass and drums.

Vander felt that the French tongue was too perfumey for this kind of hard music, and he disliked the sound of English as well. So he made up his own language, a vaguely Germanic, craggily mellifluous thing called Kobaian, which came to him, he said, in his sleep. Meanwhile, Vander's thematic vision was grand, and apocalyptic: He developed a nine-part opus for Magma that would tell the story of the Kobaïans, a race of humans who'd fled the degradation of life on Earth and settled on another planet, only to find they'd dragged Earth's miseries along with them. The solution, of course, was annihilation. The opus was never completed; after the release of Part 4, *Mékanik Destruktiw Kommandöh*

(1973), the plan seems to have been abandoned, although the group continued to sing in Kobaian and a mixture of English, French and vocalese.

Vander's arcane worldview—requiring concept albums, quasi-operatic vocals and a distinctly non-rock & roll harmonic/melodic language—was sneered at by American rock critics, naturally, 'cause it sounded nothing like a bar band from New Jersey and totally neglected lyrical themes of sports, cars and pussy. Yet Vander's trip was not that far removed from the eccentricities of critics' fave Sun Ra, or, for that matter, John Coltrane. At its best, Magma's music, in particular *MDK* and its 1974 follow-up, the eternally cryptic *Kohntarkosz*, defined a sound roughly intersecting

MAGMA
KOHNTARKOSZ



Top: The cover of '74's landmark *Kohntarkosz*. Above: They are Magma, prog as fuck.

Below: Christian Vander in action, October 1976.



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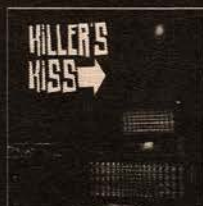
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progressive jazz, Bartók and heavy metal, related texturally to Mahavishnu Orchestra and Red-era King Crimson. *Köhtarkösz* concerns an exploration of an Egyptian tomb, its serpentine, mozaical structure redolent of incense, mold and fire.

Magma's sound grew wicked, culminating in the 18-minute metal masterpiece "De Futura" from the album *Üdü Wüdü*, written by the band's then-bassist Jannick Top, who was in the habit of tuning his bass down to C for an extra-resonant brutality. Vander's music could not, however, sustain all that dark hubris, and over the years Magma became lighter, more vocal-oriented and lyrical, even. Band members for this technically demanding enterprise came and went; many of France's best players, including violinist Didier Lockwood and bassist Bernard Paganotti, joined the ranks.

Vander himself has frequently been called, well, "the world's greatest drummer." (It's a prog-geek kind of thing to say, but there's some validity to it in this case.) A powerfully original and audacious maelstrom of controlled polyrhythmic fury, he's a feral cross between Tony Williams, Billy Cobham, Rashied Ali and, of course, Elvin Jones. In recent years he's formed two other bands, Offering and the Christian Vander Trio, to further explore his jazz roots, and has engaged Magma in varied instrumental frameworks, including performances with large choirs and a version of *MDK* sung by a children's chorus. Meanwhile, Magma has inspired an actual genre in France and Japan, called Zeuhl Music, with several bands (Japan's rough-hewn Ruins, France's very scary Shub Niggurath) adapting the Magma model of folkloric chants, twinkling ostinatos and raging rhythm sections to their own forbidding ends.

Circa '05, Magma is still at it. Vander revived the band in the early '90s—primarily, says his wife/manager/bandmate Stella Vander, because a new generation of Magma fanatics begged Christian to reform the unit and let them have a turn devoting themselves to the rigors required by this strange, obsessive music. A couple of months ago Magma released their first album of new material in many years, *Köhtarkösz Anteria*—not entirely new, however, as it's a reworking and augmenting



From the top: John Coltrane, 1965; drummer Elvin Jones, November 1963; Magma bassist Jannick Top, September 1973; the Mars Voltans.



inside.

(Check out www.seventhrecords.com for Magma catalog ordering information.)

Punk rock started in 1976. It's almost 30 years later, and you know something? Some of us don't want to pay our hard-earned bread to see a buncha yobboes in T-shirts drinking beer onstage and grinning like regular joes as they play the same three chords, in roughly the same progressions, as any beginning guitar player. Sometimes, we want a bit more. A bit more proficiency, a bit of ambition, some exploration. Maybe even some grandeur. POMP. Spectacle.

Perhaps it's The Mars Volta (and their sillier corollary The Darkness) who'll bring that awestruck feeling back to the masses. Perhaps not—perhaps it really is too late to erect the wall again. But let's just suppose...which is just what guitarist/composer Omar A.

of a one-hour epic from 1972 they had never recorded or performed live. Musically it's the missing link between the Gypsy-metal-jazz chant & throb of *MDK* and the Emëntéht Rê (descending into the tombs) sound as heard on the more angular and spare *Köhtarkösz*. (Apparently Magma abandoned *K.A.* after Mike Oldfield stole several themes, including the famous *Tubular Bells* main motif, while living at Manor Studios when Magma came to record *MDK*. Or so Vander claims. Funny to ponder the possibility that it was Magma who in fact provided the seed money to launch the Virgin Records worldwide mega-behemoth ...)

Longtime Magma fans and curious newcomers will find a lot to rave about on *K.A.* The studio band is the same lineup that toured the States in 1999, a young, lean and extremely mean crew that doesn't pussyfoot too reverently around the material and which boasts, significantly, a simply fantastic bass player named Philippe Bussonnet who is the equal in fierce inventiveness and true threatening heaviness of his forebears Jannick Top and Bernard Paganotti. *K.A.* is not heavy like "De Futura" was metal-band heavy, yet in the spectacularly disciplined interplay between the complexly polyrhythmic and odd-timed bass, Fender Rhodes, mesmerizing chants/vocals and, of course, just totally wicked drums, drums, drums, it's got real magic—a kind of black magic—deep

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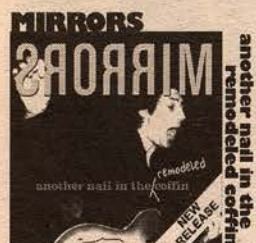


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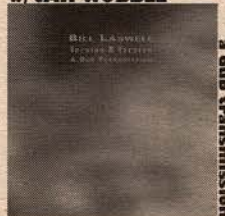
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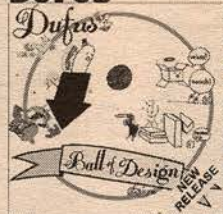
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Rodriguez-Lopez does on his band's *Frances the Mute*, the new Mars Volta disc. It's a concept album, about what exactly I couldn't tell you, and I think the band likes it that way. Some of it supposedly concerns itself with AIDS—perfect metaphorical stuff for these guys, allowing for an extremely inconclusively worded multipart song cycle in five sections, spread out over what must be the full 74 minutes a CD can hold. They give their pieces names like "Cygnus... Vismund Cygnus" and "Miranda That Ghost Just Isn't Holy Anymore," with sections entitled "Vade Mecum," "Pour Another Icepick" and, need you ask, "Pisacis (Phra-Men-Ma)." Lyrically, unlike musically, it's what's between the lines that attempts to speak volumes.

Musically, though, it's everything under the prog sun, times 50. It's Yes. It's Rush. Mahogany Rush, too. It's Metallica. It's Crimson. It's Neu. Perhaps more than anything, it's Pink Floyd circa *Umma Gumma* and *Atom Heart Mother*. It's pretentious as hell, and clearly, that's the precise, full-on point. On the surface you hear a lot of seriously impassioned, gonad-grabbing '70s-rock wails, and very well sung, too, by Cedric Bixler Zavala. Interestingly,

Zavala's insistent caterwauling about a jillion tiny obscurities and moods and atmospheres and smells and prickly feelings and cobwebs and the moon and disease and so on doesn't wear on you. That says something. Maybe it's 'cause he gives the impression that he's telling a story, and 'cause Rodriguez-Lopez's music is so varied and surprising: metallic staccato juggernauts of drums/guitars/bass, liberally laced with '70s Brit-jazz (Soft Machine) horns, violas, 'trons and, significantly, huge portions of Mexican and Cuban musical shades and styles.

It's when they let these Latin sections or dolorous prog-jazz weirdness sections go on for such a loooong time that you sense a kind of integrity and seriousness of purpose about the Mars Volta. What's really interesting is that neither these extended non-typically-rocking passages nor the inevitable returns to heavy-band machine gun carnage seem to blur interest. (That is, if you're someone who actually likes to sit and listen to albums all the way through, like a lot of the original progressive rock records of the early '70s allowed for and encouraged.) To say that this music is "overplayed"—a common complaint about MV from critics who sealed their punk rock- and/or minimalism-inspired minds back in the '80s—is way beside the point;



this is maximalism, and it's supposed to dominate your body and mind, splatter your face, then melt back down in a big puddle, into which you can gaze and see a reflection of yourself... I'd argue that its proper reception will depend on how you much sleep you got, how much of the good stuff you imbibed/smoked, and—more importantly—how young you are. Because, technically speaking, it's working with your levels of testosterone or ovum.

These rather amazing quagmires of sound were most fortunate to be crafted by an obsessive weirdo like Omar A. Rodriguez-Lopez, someone who, like Christian Vander, is just consumed with his vision, and the moral of the story is that, actually, in rock, any kind of obsession is where it's at, no matter the "pretension" of the outcome. Surely we've all realized by now that one never really says anything in "rock" music by holding back one's real impulses. Not holding back—and risking ridicule—means being honest, just as "honest" as Bruce Springsteen.

One hundred times the band that Metallica ever was: The Mars Volta's Omar A. Rodriguez (top) and Cedric Bixler Zavala.

Well, no need to defend it, I don't think. But here's another moral to the story: a younger generation of musicians have radically upped the ante in recent years, as players, songwriters and real musical imaginers. The Mars Volta are 100 times the band that Metallica ever was, not just technically but in terms of artistic ambition. There is something undeniably thrilling about any group of young musicians who are so focused on what they're doing, so fucking into it, and you're hearing it and grasping that what they've accomplished has taken an enormous amount of work—discipline—and they're carrying it out with precision and guts. That the Mars Volta play the fuck out of these well-constructed and amazingly shaded pieces is just plain inspiring.

You hear a lot of "serious" musicians going on about the importance of paying attention to the space between the notes. Fact is, some music depends a lot on cramming in every note you've ever heard, in a desperate, obsessive, mad rush. The Mars Volta, like other young musicians, shouldn't worry too much about the space between notes. At this point, like Magma, they do what they do because, sounds like, it's what they were put here on Earth to do. Which gives us the opportunity to say, "Whew. The fuck was that?"



BULL TONGUE

Reviews by Byron Coley & Thurston Moore

One record we'd been waiting for a long time is the *Black Noise Practitioner* double LP (Apocrypha Totalus/Skul) by **Electrophilia**, which is Steve Parrino on heavy bass noise and Jutta Koether on strange keys. This duo has been playing around NYC for the last few years, mostly



Electrophilia

in art gallery-related scenes. Which makes sense as both members are recognized and well-regarded visual artists. The gigs we've been lucky enough to check out were always complete room crushers. Parrino's monster bass blow-outs were some of the heaviest noise grenades happening in a city awash with such everyday sonix. Jutta, who relocated to the USA from Koln, Germany, sits at her large Casio straight and tall with long ironed hair and black aviator shades playing minimalist structures and rhythmic pokes. Here is what Jutta wrote about Electrophilia:

A music of resistant resonance - moving forward and from - a post punk existential - toward a megalith that collapses into a black hole joyously toward the void toward you not an end point but process - a supersession & pure expression of impossible range only the impossible is worth the effort - materialist music rendered with unconditional love - black psychedelic noise crashing minimalisms temporarily suspending all rules of sound - a virtual practice way of life - electrophilia a Fresh Aufhebung keeps occurring only in the present in the unconditional urgency of a Now.

Though they never really mingled into whatever inner noise circles there were in the area, all who saw them left with appreciative mind-zap. Parrino went on to release a few documents: seven-inches, CDs, artist books and mags (one recent book was *No Texts*, published through the Marianne Nowotny-related Abaton Book Co.) A notorious performance in 1979 called "Guitar Grind" was Parrino rubbing two electric guitars together, creating screaming insane feedback. Since the mid-'80s he was showing work that was at once abstract and slashing as well as graceful and sublime. Though part of the celebrated East Village Neo Geo scene, he was total punk rock. The tragedy here is that Parrino died in a motorcycle accident this past New Year's Eve. He was 46, a good, good dude. We'll miss him for sure.

Although certain heads took it upon themselves to warn me against the "stupid machismo" of *Burmese*, I think their hennings were red. *Men* (Load Recordings) is the third album by these San Franciscans,

and they really kinda make that two-bass-and-two-drum thing sound like it's a natural step in sonic evolution. Some mooks have commented on the static nature of this LP's music, but it seems to me that the magmic core is fairly glistening with all kinda post-core noise

squantum. And it's really kinda moving and emotional. For men, I mean. *Sighting's* third effort, *Arrived in Gold* (Load Recordings) is pretty manly, too. But the spectral presence of non-rockers Samara Lubelski and Chris Freeman means that there's a special kinda non-rock action going on amidst the noise, too. Call it whatever you want, but I hear a new kinda freedom, baby. And it's mighty upful.

As usual, there are several blatches of greatness dropped from the poop hatch of Ed Hardy's Eclipse Records label. First (perhaps) is the new **Michael Yonkers** LP, *It's Only Yonkers* (co-released with Galactic Zoo Dossier). Yonkers is a legendary Midwest psych guitarist, interest in whom was revived by a crucial archeological de Stijl release a couple years ago (which was reissued by Sub Pop). This new session is a blast-extremely raw loud guitar sprayed through classic one-man-band weirdness. Reminiscent of George Brigman or Horton or any of the other old school DIY heavies, with a cool Amerindian approach to rhythms. Beautiful. Just caught up with Eclipse's second **Jack Rose** LP, also. *Apocalyps X/Raag Manifestos* is another brilliant set of acoustic guitar inventions from this member of Pelt. Jack has really grasped a special place in the post-Fahey finger-master universe, and I just wish I woulda been able to catch his shows with Glenn Jones. Damn! There's also the third volume of the proposed ten-volume set of double LPs reissuing the **Sun City Girls'** cassettes. *Fresh Kill of a Cape Hunting Dog/Def in Italy* is crucial '83-85-era stuff, and would be a very nice introduction to anyone who doesn't understand how deep and wide and fast the Girls' creative river runs. From pure mess to brilliant sharpness, it's all here. Lastly is *Puhalluspelto* by **Paivansade**, one of those super-rural Finnish the-woods-are-full-of-acid-and-feathers bands. This is very pre-electric and stoned-sounding instrumental madness. Perfect for late night glistening.

Something heavy happened in Finland again, this time in Tampere. Some float-head members of Tomutonttu and Uton connected in a basement and shared "bowed rainbow, contact-mic'd worm brains, boiling water, electric organs and shameless vocals" and created **Hevoset**. The cassette from this union is beautiful and amazing. Gorgeous

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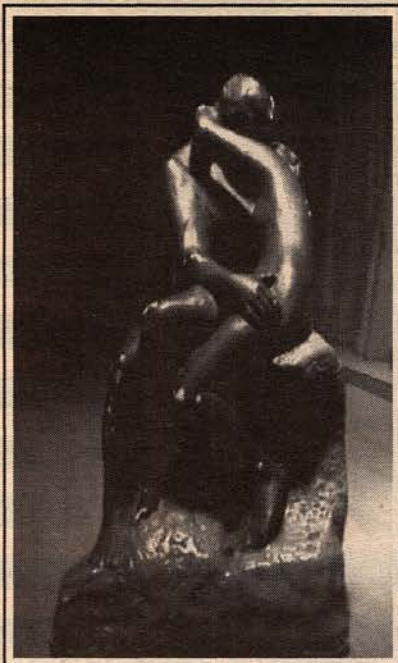
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Holy shits. I recently mentioned to Chris McBeth that I hadn't been getting any of the stuff from his label, Beta Lactam Ring, and he sent me what can only be described as a massive and lovely package of goop. It included: **Edward Ka-Spel's** *Pieces of 8* 2LP. Ka-Spel is the longtime leader of the **Legendary Pink Dots** as well as a prolific solo artist. This set is wildly psychedelic in a very organic sense of the word, from Floydian river grunts to rubbery electronic dives into fields of peaches. Ka-Spel's bandmate, **Martijn de Kleer** also has his solo debut here, *So Close Yet So Far Out*, a double album that combines totally great psychedelic songs with extended drug-noodle soundscapes. 'Snice. As is their deluxe vinyl issue of LPDs' *A Perfect Mystery*, a simmering dream of dystopian weasel elegance that is another beautiful addition to their amazing shelf of records. *Despite the Cloak* by **Songs of Norway** is an LP of trio improvisations by a unit whose members went on to form Volcano the Bear. Violin, trumpet, bass and drums combine themselves in woozy ways, reminding me a bit of some recent No

Neck offshoot action and maybe some of that classic Futura-style free rock. **Christus & the Cosmonauts' The Four Whores' Men** LP is a funny blend of homemade garage prog, neo-new wave scooting and kinda Residential filigree. And it's all set inside an apocalyptic moral framework. Sheesh. *Deluge* by **Daniel Menche** is a fine example of his rumbling drones and rising tones, but this time around the sounds are generated by actual musical instruments. At times they even approach the darkness of chocolate-based prog, those sounds.

Dreamcatcher is part of the Fluorescent Friends scene in Montreal. It's a duo of Katherine Kline on drum machines, guitar and vox and Blake Hargreaves on turntables, guitars and vox. Blake was the dude who made the awesome *Waxathon* LP from a couple of years ago. This cassette is two unbroken weirdo groove-damaged workouts that are for the most part killer. But you can be sure of that as it's released through Nautical Almanac's Heresee label, which means satanic goodtimes are guaranteed.



From top: Dreamcatcher, Hevoset, Jack Rose and JMSTWGHPRR.

Another Heresee super-rad release is *Intuitive American Esoteric Vol 1* by **JMSTWGHPRR** (perhaps best known to all ten-year-old girls merely as Twig). Twig is the manchild of Nautical Almanac and, along with partner Carly Ptak, lives in a haunted Baltimore bombfactory called Tarantula Hill. These kids live, eat, throw gigs, and create massively hectic lathe cut joints. Twig will lathe cut anything: meat, dead animal skin, face, aluminum, glass. You name it, he'll record a sick-ass groove in it for your Stanton stylus to skrape through. This first LP is 180grm virgin vinyl, pressed in Czech Republic, with one side mastered through a tin can presto lathe. It sounds boss as shit, completely loud and extra-gnarled and frazzed. Heresee split release this with Audiobot, Ignivomous, No Sides and White Tapes. The next installment will be with a buncha other labels. That Twig, what a smoker!

Dang, it has already been a decade since **Lee Ranaldo's Road Movies** appeared. Soft Skull Press has done a new tenth anniversary edition, with a buncha new poems and pics, a new afterword and all that stuff. And the book reads better than ever. Lee really grabbed a solid piece of the blurred eternal road hunch

here. Read it and weep. Also worth reading & weeping over is the great new collection of poems by **Ira Cohen, Chaos & Glory** (Elik Press). Many of these were written during Ira's wanderings of the past few years, and they move wonderfully from the mystical to the prosaic and back again. In our opinion, Cohen's work has continued to grow in parallel with his poet's belly. So it's REALLY GREAT these days. Take a look. Another swank volume is **Erik Morse's Spacemen 3 & the Birth of Spiritualized** (Omnibus). Erik has really gotten down deep into the guts and context of what I consider to be one of the '80s' defining bands. And their history is a very great and well-warted read, with tangential links to all kindsa stuff that's great to read about either in bed or on a boat. It's way past the bogosity of standard rock-write, and there should be an American printing soon.

Onestar Press has published an artist book by **Jonas Mekas** simply called *Artists Book*. Jonas is the long-standing proprietor of NYC's Anthology Film Archives, the home

of underground cinema since the early '60s. He's the man most responsible for anyone's knowledge of avant garde/experimental film, as well as a real gentleman and an excellent filmmaker in his own right. His film from 2000, *As I was Moving Ahead Occasionally I Saw Brief Glimpses of Beauty*, was a six-hour-long study of daily life with all negative aspects shorn from it, so it ran like a color treatise on bliss. Very o-zonking with a lot of the sound being raw camera input way overloaded. This book is a slight collection of friendly ephemera like early postcards from Patti Smith and Allen Ginsberg and notes, drawings and letters from all kinds of people on the scene. Jonas is a cultural icon in Europe. Here in America he's a fringe avant garde artist who struggles to keep the Anthology existing as a treasure trove/library of art cinema. He's been there on the front lines with the development of pop art, Fluxus, happenings etc. And he ain't done making trouble yet. Mekas rules.

You know who else rules? **Dame Darcy**. She's been writing and stitch-binding comic books and short stories for some years now and they are all weirdly fascinating autobiographical sojourns. When we first ran into Darcy she was walking on tabletops at CBGB, preparing to hit the stage where she'd sing banjo-billy goth death tunes in pig latin. It was hard not to like. She's since relocated to L.A. and has been working out of that "piss-hole of a city" (that's what Sex Pistols' Steve Jones calls it on his lunch hour radio show *Jonesy's Jukebox*). We ran into her a couple of nights ago and she handed over a new mag she did with her pal **Miss Satanica**. Darcy illustrates and she and MS have a dialogue inside talking about growing up in Idaho Falls, Idaho (though at different periods of time). The shared memory of madness and lonesome mind insania in the tiny burg is some hot reading. Darcy dreamed so hard about hanging with punk freaks in clubs she could only read about that she'd blast her stereo and party down alone in her room fantasizing she was in some ripping club in some big city. Miss Satanica's story is way more intense



From top: Dame Darcy and Miss Satanica's *Hideous Tales*, *Lamps*, Jonas Mekas and Volt.

as she's left to the wilds of detention centers and the evil heat of middle America. Get it. It's called *Hideous Tales of Decadence and Debauchery*.

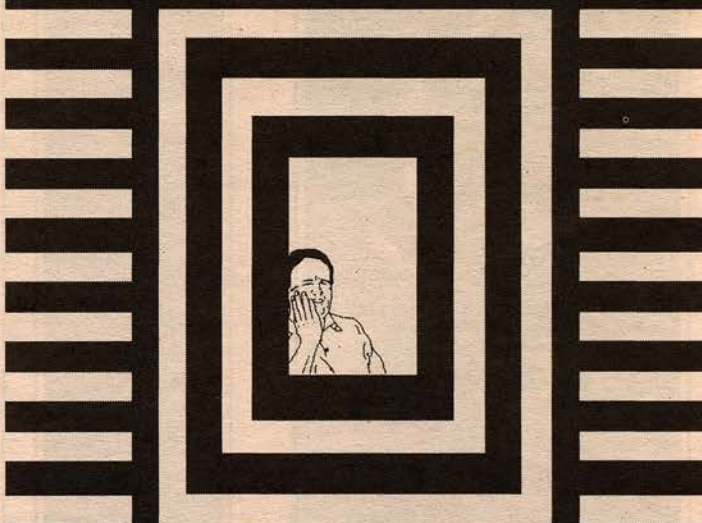
Our nation's most superb rock-qua-rock label, In the Red, has a pair of new foot-long stand-outs. The eponymous debut by SoCal trio, **The Lamps**, is in the classic ITR style. This means it investigates the connections between the Electric Eels, the Cramps, Harry Pussy and the Huntches. And sure, the lines-of-descent are clear to anyone who knows how to look for them, but so few do! Anyway, the Lamps disgorge raw chunks of elemental blat, deeply distorted on a whole lotta levels, and are aggressively trebly as hell. It's a keeper. As is the eponymous **Volt** MLP, although it's in a very different musical mode. It sounds like the music for some sorta carnival midway game, composed on chord organ by Suicide, although there's really a kinda fey Crime edge to the vocals and pomp as well. Sissy aktion gets no heavier!

Weirdo Begeirde have come out of nowhere—well, L.A., same thing—and infected our jaded wise ass nor'easter battling noise 'nads with a sticky sex pop freak of an LP called "so I'm dude in this equation." WB are a couple of menthings and some very foxyfied womenoids and it seems like they've been having fun recording with this

cool-as-shit little label there called Not Not Fun, who've pretty much just released cassettes and limited vinyl extracts by **Foot Village** and other new fractured good time lover punk. Also worth blooming about is the label's *Shark* LP by **My Sexual Dad**, which has a kinda molten bi-teen vibe. Shit, fuck hate—go to The Smell and hang with these abba zabbas—they now ruleth.

The new issue (#15) of Monte Beauchamp's **Blab** (Fantagraphics) has hit the racks, and it's everything you'd more or less hope for. Monte has a great eye and stirs well-known and brand new artists together, using single panel illustrations or longer stories, to create a superb mix of today's graphics for today's eyeballers! It has been their best anthology title for a long time now, and shows no sign of wilting.

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dredd foole - 'a long, losing battle...' lp
magik markers - 'i trust my guitar, etc.' lp
dead machines - 'human brain wasting syndrome lp
chicken legs weaver - 'wishbone hands' lp
the notekillers - '1977 - 1981' cd **mouthus - 'loam' lp**

Zs

Zs "Karate Bump" CD Following their Vothoc / Troubleman debut, New York's Zs brings their brutal chamber music towards a new exploration of the extremes of compositional complexity and virtuosity as well as extended rhythm. From bombastic Prog Rock counterpoint, to barely audible breathing sounds performed by two guitarists, two drummers, and two tenor saxophones players.



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so so many white white tigers
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Fantagraphics has also compiled a single volume of Peter Bagge's grunge-era Buddy stories from *Hate*. The book is called *Buddy Does Seattle* and it just nails the whole rock scene of the early '90s so goddamn brilliantly that they should build a goddamn time capsule around it. Another bonus read is the first issue of the reborn *Prague Literary Review*. One of the nicest English-language lit zines from Europe, this issue of PLR has great stuff by Matt Wascovich, Todd Colby, Dennis Cooper and Pavel Brycz. It mixes prose, poetry and critical writing really well, and looks and feels like a champ. First and last issue of *This Magazine Should be Read Loud* has a berserk organizational motif that more or less matches its crazy music coverage. But don't read it in the tub, cause water melts its pages! Which is not really true of the new issue of *Fish Piss*, although its silkscreened cover is probably not too good underwater. More politics this time around, and the massive history of recorded sound continues in a variety of ways. *Fish Piss* is one of the best reads around.

Like wine, not all good noise music has to be exclusive and priced out of reach. In fact, beyond exorbitant collector prices for rarified Macronympha and New Blockaders LPs, there's really no cheaper way to spend your \$\$ for good times. This is surely the case with the *Recycled Tape* series **Ron Lessard** at **RRRecords** has been sleeplessly running off. His dealio is that he gets boxes of thrift store cassettes for pennies per pound (all kinds of stuff: Aerosmith, John Waite, Go-Gos, Rush (suck)), and solicits almost anyone and everyone making some kind of serious mark on the hyperactive noise scene to deliver a session for him to dupe on to these babies and he gaffer tapes the box and magic markers the artist's name on it—done—no titles—just the same generic every time: *Recycled*. He's been doing this for years and there are over a hundred titles. And they're only like four or five bucks a pop. At first we may have looked upon these as the ultra barrel scrape



From Top: Blab, the one and only Peter Bagge, Loons, Misunderstood, Weirdos and Ugly Things.

of world noise spoo, but in all actuality it seems the artists—especially now with Connelly, Asmus Tietchens, Mike Shiftlet et al.—are all delivering business-class-upgrade-works to Ron that fucking KILL. Grab a grab bag and go get some.

Mike Stax got out issue 22 of the great *Ugly Things* and, as always, it makes us realize how slack we are in some areas of collecting and general knowledge. For the past many years, *Ugly Things* has done an amazing job of thoroughly covering the range of rock (and selected other genre) reissues, and printing massive archeological articles about all manner of '60s wildmen. As the mag's name suggests, their true love is UK spazz R&B, but they don't insist on specialization. This new mega issue has the third part of their incredible coverage of the *Misunderstood* (a California-to-UK band of unlimited potential wrecked by the spectre of 'Nam), and so much more I don't even know where to begin. Suffice to say it'll keep you stuck to the toilet for many happy hours. As if this weren't enough, *Ugly Things* is a label now, too. First two releases are the *Lost Acetates* LP by the *Misunderstood* (featuring fantastic raw '65-66 demo explosions) and the superb *Paraphenalia* CD by the *Loons* (Stax's own band, following in the freak/raunch tradition the mag ballyhoos). Get 'em while you can.

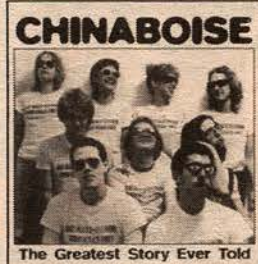
New split LP by *Sword Heaven* and *16 Bitch* *Pile-up Come Here, Sandy* (Cephia's Treat/Gameboy) is an uncorked gush of menstrual spooage and testicular skree. *16 Bitch* roll out gnarly drone noise

with sublime yet spectacular results while *Sword Heaven* fall into ultra-violent cock tug nightmare. Sweet. 'Nother kinda split we got is sorta confusing. It makes no sense to me that two songwriters as prolific as **Simon Joyner** and **Dennis Callaci** couldn't come up with a full LP's worth of songs between them, but here's the proof THEY COULD NOT: one side and five songs, that's it. Still, *Stranger Blues* (Catsup Plate) has more good tunage on it than the vast

majority of two LP sets, so I guess there's no reason to belch too goddamn hard. Recorded in Dennis' living room, this is a very casual record, acoustic, naked and as beautiful as a foot. The songs are not radically crafted, but they're fucking great, with touches of Lou Reed, Peter Laughner, Skip Spence and many other top singing scribes. Really nice stuff. But is there an actual reason it wasn't a full LP or backed with Paste demos or something? What the fuck?

De Stijl records out of Minneapolis, MN has decided to blow our minds with a three-LP set of music by **Hototogisu**, which is the partnership of Vibracathedral Orchestra's Matthew Bower and Double Leopards' Marcia Bassett; this record is Matthew solo, circa 2001. True to the evocation of the duo's name, that of a Japanese songbird heralding the coming summer, the music plays with contemplative bliss and edged rock psychosis. Edition of 300 copies and as fine a grip you'll find all year. De Stijl has no site but this LP and maybe other shite from the label can be located through Eclipse, Fusetron, and in the UK, Volcanic Tongue (who have all kinds of weird, handmade-by-Marcia Hototogisu shirts and hoodies). If you can stand to have a CD enter your realm you may wanna seek the **Hototogisu Swoon Scream/Heavy Blossom CDR** which is available through Foxy Digitalis. Also awesome.

Awsomeness seems to be in the air around Sacramento lately as well. Beside the A-Frames and Doug Blazek, there's been all that stuff from SS Records and related fall-out. It's almost enough to make you wanna visit the place. Craziest Sacto object today is the new LP by **Sexy Prison**, *Italians Who Just Saw Rocky* (Nascar). These guys have a rep for being a disturbed disco kinda duo, but the sounds here are much less beatoid than they are nutso. Lotsa punk moves, tape noise spluttering in from dark corners, mooky sounds busting up through the floorboards and all that. And there are beats, and you can imagine hot pants pretty easily while you listen to this, but it's really more like some kinda pure electro-hawk-aggro move dressed up for Saturday night in the Bronx. More oriented towards pure ass-grindery is the new 12" by space-fops, **Glass Candy**. *Life*



From top: Dennis Callaci and Simon Joyner's "Stranger Blues," Hototogisu, Chinaboise, and a Mt. Gigantic album cover with bonus Mt. Gigantic live action shot.

After Sundown (Troubleman Unlimited) combines three version of the track (straight, instrumental & acapella) for your very own sugar hop fiesta. What the hell?

If noise music is really the new music (and really for real this time), you're gonna have to prepare yourself for **Hive Mind**. Pretty much one Mountain Dew-swigging Michigan dude named Greh, Hive Mind has issued what may be the virtual gauntlet of USA noise releases so far in the '05. It's the Hanson Records CD *Death Tone* (yeah, CDs are not what we generally WANT to review here, but this one shreds the template, plus Greh has equally kill city cassettes popping off day and night on his own label, Chondritic Sound, so...) and it is the one you can play to make any square pup's head combust. Hive Mind is focused on a timeless tone of skin crawl ear/brain shatter and he's come to masterful point with it. In a league with such heavy purveyors as Prurient and John Olson. This shit is excellent.

Well, if we're gonna mention CDs, it would be irresponsible to not mention *The Greatest Story Ever Told* by **Chinaboise** (Gulcher). Chonaboise were a project begun by Rich Stim in 1975, as a way to meet some young ladies in the Bloomington, Indiana area. It was great kinda underground beatnik

music thing, which included drummer Dave Mahoney. Rich asked guitarist Bruce Anderson to help with some guitar. And when Bruce and Dale Sophea were getting ready to put together a new art rock band, they thought of Stim & Mahoney, thus birthing the legendary MX-80 Sound. Anyway, these are part of that band's roots—the funnier, more casual and vocally-oriented parts (although the tunes with Bruce are pure proto-MX). There has only been one track out before (on the *Bloomington One* sampler), but the stuff sounds great! And Stim really has a goddamn strange way of writing songs. It's really kinda NOW, if you know what I mean. 'Course, the newer sound of Bloomington is probably more aptly represented by the *Old Smiler* LP by **Mt. Gigantic** (Friends and Relatives). Appearing to be bit of an ad hoc ensemble, these guys play music that is as varied (but internally congruent) as A Silver Mt. Zion or something. Certain parts have a run-around

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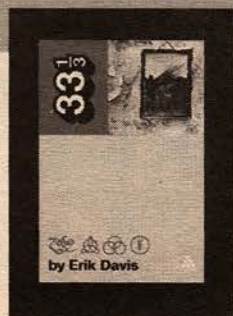
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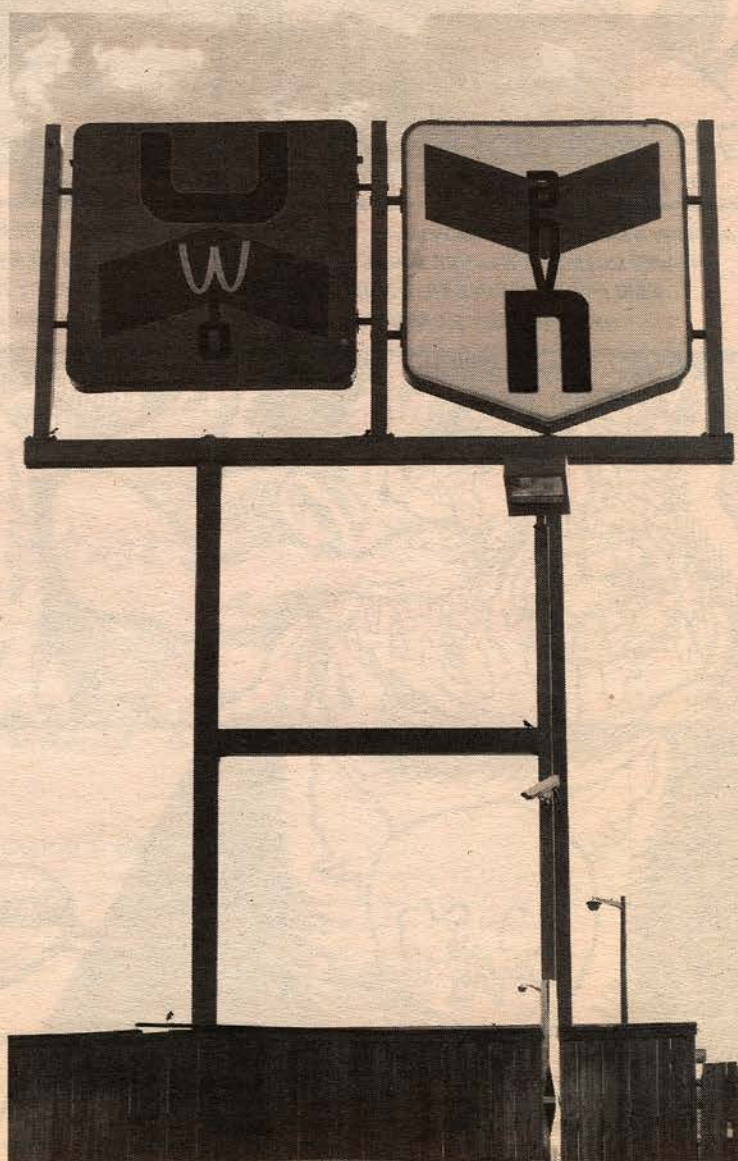


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Sam Ott, from Sigil Logos, No. 5 of 5

TRAUMA VALLEY • SPRING 2005 BY SLIM MILES

WHAT?! WHAT'S THAT?!
SPEAK UP! I CAN'T HEAR!
WHAT IT WAS LIKE? YOU
REALLY WANT TO KNOW?



MY NAME IS JASON MILES AND I'M
AN OLD MAN NOW. BORN IN THE
YEAR 1922, I WAS QUICK IN
COMING TO EXPERIENCE THE
STATES OF DESIRE AND CONFUSION.

AS SOON AS I CAN REMEMBER I WAS ALWAYS
SEEKING SOME KIND OF EUPHORIA, SOME
FORM OF RELIEF. RELIEF FROM WHAT?
I'M NOT REALLY SURE... I GUESS FROM LIVING.



SPRING OF 1939 I HAD MY FIRST "GIRL-
FRIEND." SHE WAS 19 AND SMOKED LOTS
OF CIGARETTES. WHAT WAS HER NAME...?

I'D PICK HER UP IN MY MODEL T AND
WE'D GO DOWN TO GOLDEN GARDENS,
DOWN BY THE WATER.



EVERY TIME I'D KISS THE LENGTH
OF HER NECK SHE'D MOAN LIKE A MULE.

ONE TIME, WE WERE JUST SITTING THERE,
LISTENING TO THE WAVES WASH ASHORE.
I MOVED MY HAND ACROSS THE UPHOLSTERY
AND DOWN HER SHIRT FEELING THE TILT OF HER
BREAST. THE MOON WAS FULL AND SWOLLEN.

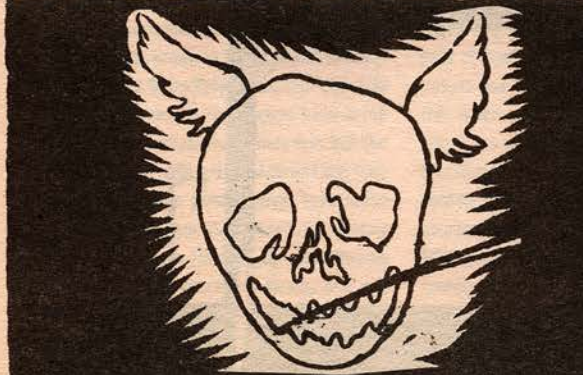


A STRANGE AMBIGUOUS COMBUSTION LURCHED INSIDE
ME. I CRAVED FOR HER PLEASURE. IN MY DESPERATION
I SLID MY HAND DOWN HER BELLY AND TO HER PANTIES.
SHE STARTED TO JUMP AND KICK LIKE A JACKASS.
WHEN IT WAS DONE I COULD ONLY HEAR HER BREATH.

WITH MY HAND IN THE MOONLIGHT, I SAW BRIGHT RED "BLOOD" DRIPPING DOWN MY FINGERS AND INTO MY PALM. BITING HER LOWER LIP, SHE LOOKED
MY WAY WITH HER BLOUSE OPEN. TAKING MY RED HAND IN HERS SHE SMEARED HER MENSTRUATION ACROSS MY FACE. SHE THEN
RAN MY RED FINGER DOWN THE BRIDGE OF HER NOSE; IT LEFT A VIBRANT TRAIL TOWARDS HER LIPS. WE LOOKED LIKE A PAIR
OF REDSKINS READY FOR WAR. WE STARTED KISSING AND SQUEEZING EACH OTHER AS IF WE WERE AFRAID OF FALLING ASLEEP.

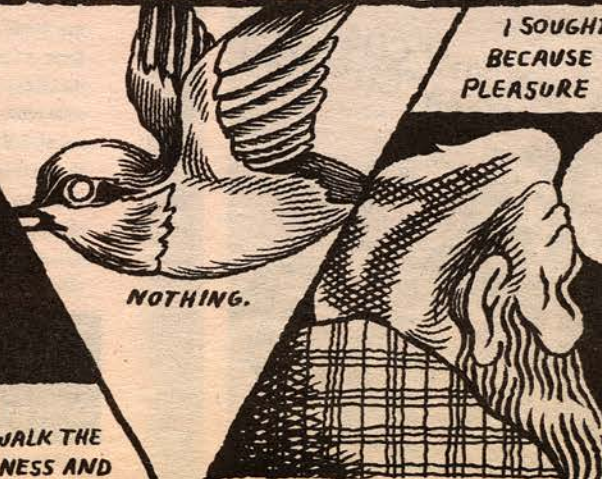


I SOUGHT THE RELIEF I FOUND IN WOMEN
BECAUSE I WANTED TO FEEL THE
PLEASURE I GAVE AWAY TO THEM.



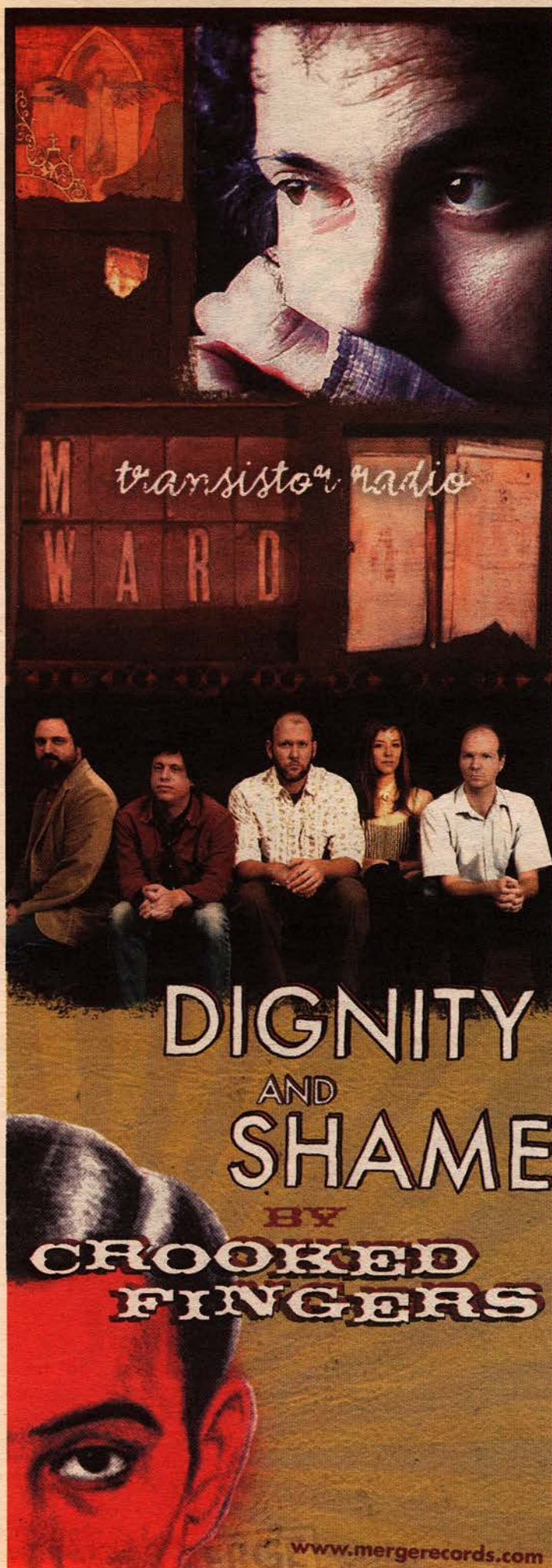
NOTHING.

I NOW DREAD IT WHEN SPRING COMES, WHEN ALL THE
BAREFOOT GIRLS COME OUT IN THEIR BEAUTIFUL DRESSES TO WALK THE
GRASS. MY WHOLE GERIATRIC BODY SHAKES WITH MY SICKNESS AND
SELFISHLY ATTEMPTS TO RAISE ITSELF, ALWAYS RESULTING IN ...



SOMETIMES THE WOMAN DOWN THE
HALL COMES BY TO TRIM MY EYE-
BROWS AND CLEAN OUT MY EARS.

I ALMOST ALWAYS FALL IN LOVE WITH EVERY GIRL I MEET.



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C and D

Two guys bicker about new records.

Sleater-Kinney

The Woods
(Sub Pop)

D: Before we begin, I would like to say that today I am in the mood to rock.

C: Well, my friend, you have come to the right place.

D: [first song starts, D leaps out of chair immediately] Is this one of those Japanese bands? With a girl?!? Who is this singing?

C: That woman is not a girl—she could show you a thing or two. [dramatic pause] It's Sleater-Kinney, produced by Dave Fridmann.

D: [Jaw hits floor] Really?!? SLEATER-KINNEY????????? Fuck, man! [shakes head] This is a MAJOR statement of super-rock power! Rock 'n roll album of the year!

D: Maybe the decade. Superfuzz-heavy in the Northwest tradition of Blue Cheer-Nirvana-Mudhoney, expansive like Neil Young with Crazy Horse...Hendrix...the Who. There's stuff on here that is out as Comets on Fire, possible even further. Who's going to top this? Absolutely gigantic sounds...amps out of the red and into the black... a 14-minute song at the end that goes into Les Rallizes Denudes and Ash Ra Tempel territory...

D: I have to admit I would never have thought these three women would make a record that's this relentlessly face-melting.

C: There's some precedent in Babes of Toyland, or early Hole, maybe, but this is just so much further... Well, I'm not sure that they'd call it psychedelic but it's definitely psychoactive in an the urgent, imperative sense.

D: [musing] There's a bit of Jefferson Airplane in here.

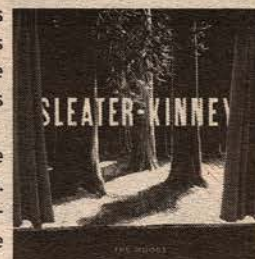
C: There's a structure to everything but there are these void spaces. And then there are straight songs too, which rock in this tight, controlled way and then blow into something else via a drum charge or a panned guitar solo or I don't know what. I know I'm going Beavis here but I don't know how to [clears throat] ...ahem... properly articulate the sensations I am feeling as I listen to this album. For a long time I didn't enjoy Corin Tucker's voice, but here? This is an ideal setting.

D: And that's some hotshit drumming for sure. [dancing] They are higher than High on Fire! They are Queens of a more stoned Age! An unheard of power monster, that singlehandedly, forever eradicates the notion that women have no balls!

C: [Gives puzzled look at D, then continues] How did this happen? Seriously. It's a lidflipper, a real wig-frier. Can you name another band that seven

albums into their career, supernovaed into this kind of territory? I want to go door-to-door like an evangelist for this record: "Hey sisters and brothers, have you heard the Good News?" But the old doors don't exist after this album. They've all been blown open.

D: Word to your moms, Sleater-Kinney drop bombs.



Oneida

The Wedding
(Jagjaguwar)

C: New one from New York underground trance/art-rockers Oneida: a favorite around the Arthur offices for years now.

D: [Listening to "The Eiger"] They're using strings?!

C: The songs are catchier, there's more dynamics in the structure, the arrangements are more varied. And the production is just nuts. This is another huge artistic breakthrough.

D: Something is in the air... Something good. A new scent.

C: Shit! Listen to how the keys get sucked out of the soundfield [on "Lavender"]... Listen to the almost-Espers psych-folk that is "Run Through My Hair." "High Life" is an optimistic vocal over a total Kraftwerk/Cluster/La Düsseldorf electronic bed that changes into something more organic...

"Did I Die" is like Wolf Eyes without the noise, whatever that means. Listen to how massive the drums are on "Spirits" and "Heavenly Choir," and how majestic the guitar is. These are their "Kashmir"'s, their "When the Levee Breaks," and this album is their *Physical Graffiti*...

Angels of Light

The Angels of Light Sing "Other People"
(Young God)

D: Sounds like Johnny Cash with the Up With People choir or the Beach Boys singing backup.

C: It's the new album by Angels of Light. You know, Michael Gira from Swans' new band. Well, if you can be on "new" when you're on your fourth album.

D: The most brutal, dealing-with-ultimate-things band ever?

C: None other. He moved away from that a while ago, but this one is sort of the moment when it all comes together for him. [listening to "Destroyer"] Listen to this: is that a mellotron, or strings? [Skipping through the record] And glockenspiels? Shit! This whole record is soaked in the most resplendent bittersweet textures, never getting sappy or fruity or corny in any way. Not an easy thing to do, for anyone. And for it to come from the



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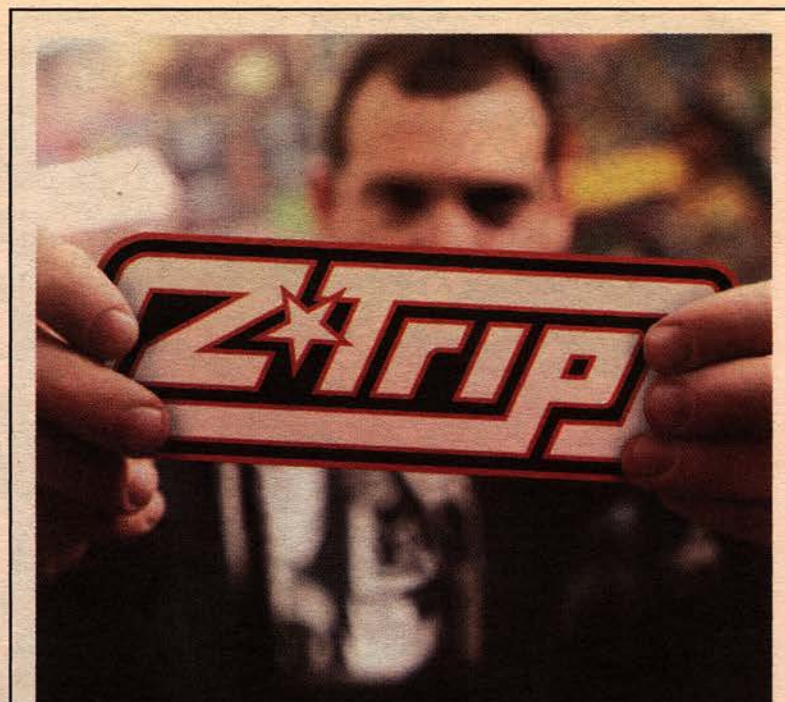
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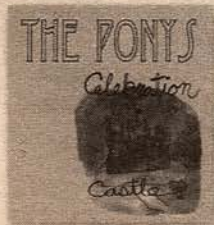
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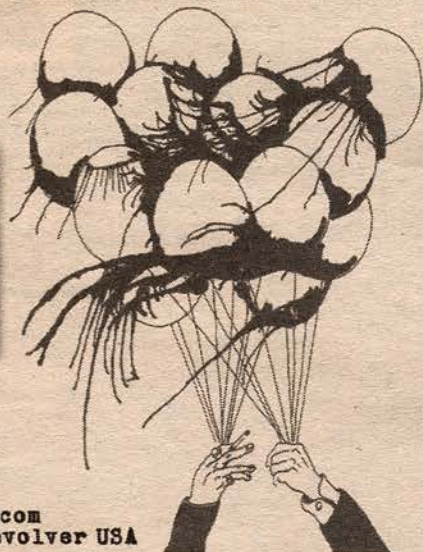


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man who wrote "Raping a Slave"?

D: [smiling beatifically] I am shocked, once again, in a pleasantly happy way. He's aging well, into something elegant and striking in his own way. Kinda like Nick Cave.

C: It is really beautiful, and represents the third risky, radical creative breakthrough SUCCESS that we've heard this session. So exciting to be in the presence of artists when they're going for it like this.

Boredoms

Seadrum/House of Sun
(Vice)

C: And now...would you believe...NEW BOREDOMS! Yoshimi sings a capella...and then this...[wave of drums crashes in]. Forty-five minutes, two tracks, completely different from each other. It says one thing: "Fuck off (in a good way). We are Boredoms. And we cannot be denied. We will now share this with you."

D: [musing] We appear to be living in magical times. Please place this on infinite repeat while I unclog every stuck nerve ending in my elderly body. Boredoms... is...life.

Brain Donor

Brain Donor
(MisterE/Revolver)

D: I don't whether to pump my fist in the air or punch myself in the face.

C: Who would have guessed that Julian Cope would be making this sort of rubber-burning rock'n'roll what, 25 years down the line?

D: His head is out on the highway. And he's stuck in sixth gear.

C: Julian calls them a stupor group. Doggen, the guitarist, plays in Spiritualized, as does drummer Kevlar. They wear neon facepaint and have empty thought balloons over their heads. They're like the Rutles version of the Stooges: songs that are just as good, with better lyrics. Dig the song titles: "My Pagan Ass," "Shaman U.F.O."

D: [shimmying] My pagan ass! My pagan ass!

C: This is a compilation CD, selections from the Brain Donor's two previous discs that were only released in the UK. Now America can welcome Brain Donor with open heads.

D: If these gentlemen are really donating their brains, I need to go to the brain bank and get one.

Turbonegro

The ResErection DVD
(MVD)

D: Aha, Turbonegro! "IT'S DEATH TIME!" They ARE rock 'n roll! In the gay sailor style of Norway!

C: I will explain D's outburst of Turbonegro passion to the gentle readers of Arthur. This is Turbonegro's *Some Kind of Monster*, the story of "how the bandmobile went off the road in 1998," and what happened next. Could Hank von Helvete

recover from heroin addiction and assorted mental problems and don the black cape and Alice Cooper makeup again? Could the Absolut-guzzling band of self-professed "death punk" godfathers successfully re-buddy after four years apart? Would anyone care? Would—

D: OF COURSE PEOPLE CARE! This is Turbonegro!

[singing] "Whoa-oh-oh/I've got ERECTION!"

C: The other difference between Turbonegro and Metallica is that Turbonegro seem quite comfortable being gay. I do not know if they are actually gay, but they play a gay band onstage

and on camera with a great deal of affection and commitment and sense of humor. Fear of a Gay Planet is the general concept.

D: [Watching Hank show off a vat of cod liver oil outside the local maritime museum where he worked for a couple of summers.] This is better

than *A Mighty Wind*!

C: We visit Hank's seaside sanctuary, where he lived for four years, rebuilding his life. "The only thing that kept me alive were my grandparents and my belief in God," he says, then compares himself to Napoleon in exile: "I was supposed to be emperor of

Europe, but I'm kept prisoner of reality." We do not know if he is joking, which is how the entire film is, it's as outrageously straight-faced as comic atrocities like *Alan Partridge* or *The Office* or *League of Gentlemen* or—I'm feeling generous—Neil Hamburger in his most sublimely awful, banal

moments. That kind of rare, supergenius thing. I don't know if I'm doing it justice...? [looking on screen] But Hank is now showing us around his hometown: "Let's stroll in the realm of dry fish..."

D: I still think they based their entire sound on the Dictators!

C: Hank's real stage name should be Gruesome Dick Manitoba.

D: They are like the Hives' evil reverse twins.

C: The Hives give 1000% every time, but as Happy Tom says here, Turbonegro give 50, maybe 60 percent. The interviewer asks if they may get 80% this time? "I don't think that's

ever happened," says Tom.

D: It's a cracker! A classic! [Thinks hard.] It's This Is Spinal Tap—by Chris Morris!!!

BBO

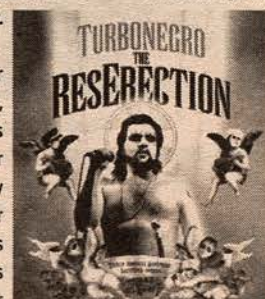
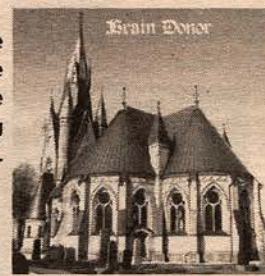
Tie Your Noose
(Bomp!)

C: Now here's a one-man garage band, doing it and

doing it well. Makes the two-piece garage band seem passé.

D: Does that mean he practices in a one-car garage?

C: Fire up the grill, this is a fatback slab of that raunchy, rib-rocking goodness. It's like Bob Log



Ill and Doo Rag in one.

D: Yes, in one big barbecue pit! Which he probably dug out behind his garage.

C: "Don't Hold Out On Me" is the hit.

D: I think it sounds like someone singing the Hives in the shower. Really, it's that good.

C: Nice to see such a fine release on the Bomp! imprint, furthering the cause of Bomp! honcho Greg Shaw, may he rock in peace.

Radar Bros.

The Fallen Leaf Pages
(Merge)

C: One of Los Angeles' subtle treasures, and group that explains the pastoral side to L.A. that only residents really know about. This music has a calming, benign presence.

D: It gives me the feeling I get from "Dear Prudence." Or my very favorite song, "Something In The Air" by Thunderclap Newman.

C: The Radars absolutely own this gentle shuffle tempo. But I think they'd loan it out to anyone who wanted it. Although sometimes the lyrics are darker than you'd expect...

D: I believe he just sang, "I am the stable in which the ass has laid his manure."

C: Walk, don't run to pick this up. Or better yet, lope.

D: Yes, amble on.

C: There is something about this that puts me in the mindset of lightning bugs in a jar. And the most wistful of Muppets songs. You can always count on Jim Putnam to take one great whistling solo per album, and he comes through here again.

D: This truly Floyd-ian, I mean *Mettle-era* Floyd. The dreaminess of it, it's positively molassesifying.

C: David Gilmour is on the phone, says the Floyd is playing the Pyramids again, and will the Radars kindly open? Could happen.

D: Should happen.

Lee Perry

I Am the Upsetter four-cd boxset
(Trojan/Sanctuary)

D: "Satan is public enemy number one." You know, this may be my favorite music to do with organized religion.

C: Sweet soul singing by Max Romeo. The production on these... it's like all these sounds aren't allowed to exist anymore, I can't imagine a contemporary producer getting anywhere near this. Anyways, since Lee Perry was rediscovered about ten years ago, there've been a lot of re-releases and vaultpilations...including the Arkology three-disk set which was a big hit with a lot of people. But this is really special—it's digestible, it's got all the great shit on it, it covers everything from the obvious

Bob Marley and the Wailers stuff to cuts even dedicated Scratch diggers may never have heard before—like "All Over" by Eccols & Neville, which is actually Clancy Eccols and Bunny Wailer. Spans 1968 to 1978, so much went by, the world



changed so much. So many artists went from next-level to the pits, but Lee Perry maintained this wonderful, playful energy...

D: I am a great admirer of the well-played unison horn line.

C: [listening to "Black Panta"] I mean what's going on here?

There is a spatial distance in dub music, a relationship between the listener and the music that's just completely, profoundly different from any other kind of music.

D: It's like growing a third ear from the inside of your forehead.

C: Seeing a stretch of the color spectrum that you'd never been shown before. I love that there are all these skank songs on here. [Looking sternly at D.] Ahem. The ORIGINAL meaning of skank, which just means a certain rhythm that's

gonna make you dance the Jamaican version of the funky chicken...

D: [with eyes closed] The echo makes the music sound like it's talking to itself. For someone who uses so much delay, he certainly was on time.

C: I always thought Lee Perry's physique, short and lean, so much finely toned power in his arms, was represented in his music. I always think of him as the producer, working the board, making compact energetic music. Totally dynamic. Full presence, just



infusing everything. All sides of him are there: the playful side, the mischievous side, the judgmental side, the father side where he puts his child in there, crying. Wailing. Pleading. And mixing that into a song that says "for god's sake give more justice to the people"? Amazing.

Ariel Pink's Haunted Graffiti

Worn Copy
(Paw Tracks)

C: [listening to opening instrumental] This sounds like one of those cheap John Carpenter scores, recorded underwater. In the wrong kind of water.

D: Cheese is not a virtue, except in certain hands.

C: These are not the right hands. [listening to "Jules



Lost His Jewels"] Although...you know, some of this is actually pretty catchy. If only Mr. low-budget Wings here weren't so stuck on recording underwater with such tragically awful sounding instruments.

D: So judgmental, you are. I think this might be a grower not a shower. [grabbing the CD out of the player] I will examine it more at home and report back next issue!

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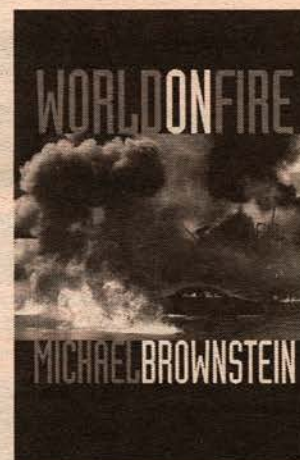
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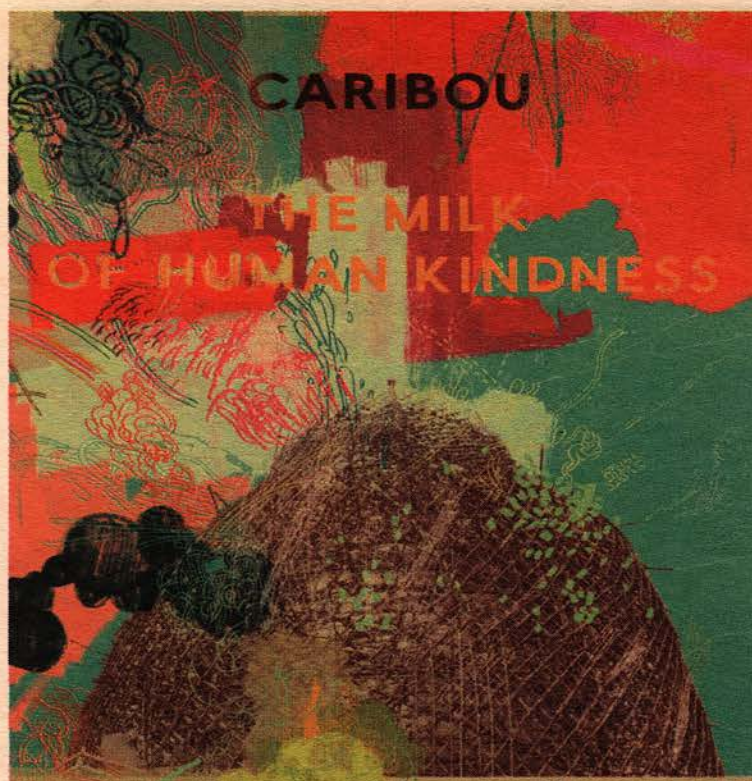
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Animal Collective and Vashti Bunyan

Prospect Hummer EP
(Fat Cat)

C: Playful, rules-less, suffused with love... Vashti and the AC boys harmonizing on these quiet little melodies... Whistles and phased waves of glowing acoustic guitars and... Is that a steel drum? Whoa.

These guys are on such a hot streak right now. So wonderful to hear Vashti's voice again, last year's duet with Devendra wasn't enough. This is a wower. You could play it for anyone: children, grandparents, sullen teenagers even...

D: [listening to title track] I think the oompa-loompas are coming.

C: Unbelievable dub-like production—there's a real unique sense of space and place here too. Where do these people live? Somewhere in Sweden, Lee Perry awakens from his slumber...

D: [blissed out] It's womblike. Feels like coming home from the greatest picnic ever.

Colleen

The Golden Morning Breaks
(The Leaf Label)

C: ...And this is what it feels like when you're in REM sleep, later. Music in miniature.

D: Mini-minimalism. Beatless.

C: So still. Satieists. A phased, handcranked music box. If a Joesph Cornell box had a sound... Wind chimes, plucked guitar figures.

D: Very cinematic. Makes me think of Bjork, Kubrick, City of Lost Children, Jeunet/Caro.

C: Colleen is Aphex Twin's ambient granddaughter. Like Eno was for a while, Aphex Twin is no longer a man, he's an adjective.

D: This is what I always hoped ambient music would sound like. Don't throw the baby out with the analog bubblebathwater!

C: ... [pauses] Can I have just a touch of whatever it is that you are on?

The Geto Boys

The Foundation
(Rap-A-Lot)

D: Who is this?

C: You know who this is.

D: The Geto Boys! Scarface, Willie D, and Bushwick Bill, together forever. Unless my mind is playing tricks on me, which is has been known to do.

C: You were right the first time, D. You may now take off the blindfold.

D: After all these years, they certainly are keeping it gangsta.

C: And yet it's soul music. From the soul, of the soul, and the slower songs on here are actually sweet soul music.

D: You know, when I'm feeling homicidal, this music calms me down.



C: I appreciate that. More than you know.

D: Well if I didn't know, now I know!

Neil Hamburger

Great Moments at Di Presa's Pizza House
(Drag City)

C: On the other hand, when I'm feeling suicidal... I think of Neil Hamburger, self-proclaimed "TV comic" and "American funnyman." [Listens to CD for a few minutes.] Well, this is a new low. Which is what you catch yourself thinking every time there's a new Neil

Hamburger album, but by now it's clear that there is no bottom.

D: What is this? [to stereo] Tell some jokes already!

C: Heckling a CD is not the same as heckling a performer, unfortunately. One thing you can say about Neil Hamburger is he's remarkably consistent.

No matter where he plays—an expat nightclub in Malaysia, a greyhound racing park in Tempe, Arizona, a pipe organ-equipped pizza parlor in Northern California—he's always just terrible, just desperately unfunny. You know what you're

getting with Neil Hamburger. The only surprise is how much worse he's managed to get since the last time you heard him.

Yellow Pills

Refill
(Numero Uno)

C: 33 power-pop 45s by super-obscure one-shot artists, compiled with mindblowing meticulousness and liner note cleverness by an obvious labor-of-lover: this guy Jordan Oaks, who used to do a zine called Yellow Pills. I gotta cop to it,

I never heard of the zine, never heard any of these songs.

D: Man! A lot of these really should have been hits. Especially the Toms? As Dr. John and the Meters might say, They were in the wrong place. They were at the wrong time.

C: This drawing of Jon Brion is incredible, when he was like 14 and a member of a band called The Bats.

D: I don't know about this one...

C: If you don't like one song, another will be along in two minutes. You'll be able to find a seat on one of them. [pauses] You know D, we've received a lot of letters asking why we are called C & D...

D: We choose to remain anonymous.

C: I bet these bands didn't want to be anonymous.

D: Well... life's like that, sometimes.



The Ponys

Celebration Castle

(In the Red)

D: Must be The Ponys. Cuz it sounds like Voidoids and Television.

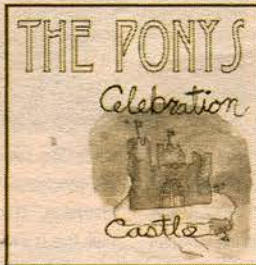
C: Yep. Less Hellish than before, though, I think.

D: [Listening to the chorus of "Glass Conversation"] Now they are rocking!

C: And check out this guitar sound. It doesn't matter what they play on their solos—although what he's playing is cool—the sounds they are getting are enough for me. Yes! The solo on "Discooteca" is really simple but it SOUNDS wonderful. That's like their second signature, after the dude's voice. [listening to "Today"] Wow this goes into a blues thing in the middle, very cool. No wonder they were on that Junior Kimbrough tribute record, it's all making sense now.

D: [philosophical] This is more like the first album than the first one was... [listening to "We Shot This World," shaking head like a tumbler.] The difficult second album is not so difficult for the Ponys!

C: Our little Ponys have all grown up.



civilization.

C: No guest vocalist this time.

D: It's very krautrockian. And Human League.

And Gary Numan, the guy that we all hated.

C: You hated Gary Numan?

D: Because he had bad teeth, and was always trying to combine the robotic and emotive. He had that pretentious super-serious yuppie look. It was bound to fail. Now he's a cult hero. Just goes to show that any shit you throw against the wall might come

down as gold. Write that down!

C: [Writing it down] Very Cluster. And the second track here...listen to this...

D: THEY ARE COVERING KRAFTWERK'S 'TRANS EUROPE EXPRESS'?! Unbelievable! That's balls!

C: These guys have got to be total stoners. They are just fucking around, having fun. You

can hear how much they're digging this.

D: Roedelius, Harmonia, all those guys... I can hear this being played in a German countryside on a nice Sunday afternoon. Very evocative, simplistic—I love it. There's a track called "Heil Xanax"? Another one called "Sons of



Spoon

Gimme Fiction

(Merge)

D: Sounds like the Kinks in a troubled mood.

C: But look they pull out a chorus melody like the Walkmen wish they could do, and I don't mean to damn with faint praise there.

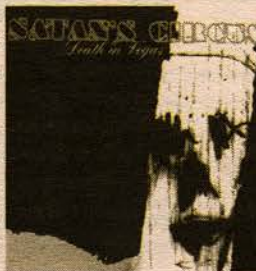
D: Great album opener.

C: It's like they're gonna confront the Kinks Klone critique head-on and then go from there... This is their best shit ever, and their shit has always been fresh. The songs are better put together... listen to the counter-melodies and harmonies... even strings... Like the Left Banke, except not so

fussy, or even SF Sorrow-era Pretty Things... Tight psychedelic-tinged upbeat soul rock. This song ["I Turn My Camera On"] is total disco! When he does falsetto, he sounds like what Beck tries to do. If they has strings swoop in we'd have Chic...

D: Maybe they're saving that for the next album, which I am already eagerly awaiting.

D: [listening to "My Mathematical Mind"] Another cinematic record. There is a hint of John Barry in the air. I picture Oliver Reed in 1965 on the prowl, on the way to a party, or the scene of a crime, whichever he reaches first. Americans are making great English music again!



Death in Vegas

Satan's Circus

(Drone)

D: New Death in Vegas? Excellent! That song with Hope Sandoval and the Indian violinist on the last album was a high point of global



Rother"? I give up. They are the victors.

C: The record is so committed to the style.

D: To me, this could be played in a stadium. "Reigen" is a German word for the old-world, Middle Ages a come-together, a joyous come together where you dance around the maypole, so there's a Wicker Man aspect to it. This shows

insane respect and love for a very specific genre. They are saying, Excuse us while we pay tribute to our love.

Josephine Foster

Hazel Eyes, I Will Lead You

(Locust Music)

C: Speaking of Wicker Man.

D: Speaking of Jefferson

Airplane.

C: Speaking of genius.

D: Speaking of...speechless.

C: She's been in Arthur before, but... Damn. This is my favorite work yet by one of my favorite voices in the world. Her most conventional songwriting, really, with fantastic arrangements and playing. All

by Josephine herself. It's not harsh like Born Heller could be, not as histrionic as last year's Supposed album was... I think people will now find out what the big deal is...

D: So many big deals right now, most of them female!

C: I know. Feels like a new dawning, a new birthing,

a new burst of feminine energy is going on, doesn't it?

D: Yes!

C: I can't wait to hear what happens next...

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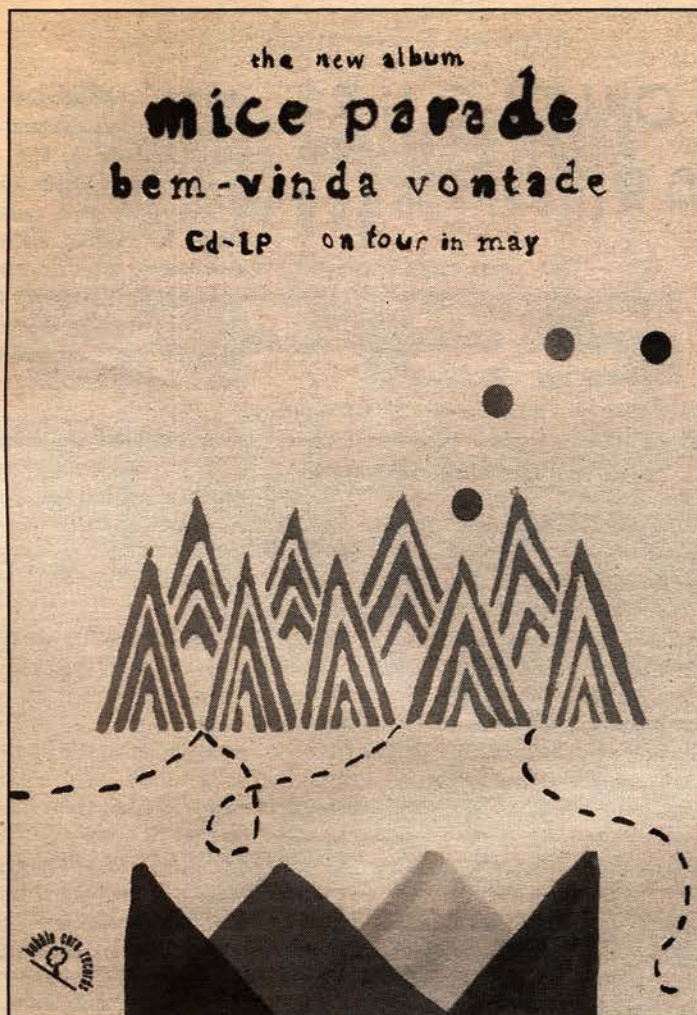
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(continued from page 39)

I had none. But she's also very punk, because she makes all the wrong choices, not because she has to, and because she chooses to. So we just sat down and learned from each other, exchanged information. Her making me stay in one spot helped me. At times I hated her for it, cause I was so bored. In the end I just gave in, gave up the fight, stayed put for a year in West London and hung with the same people, which I wouldn't even do up to that point. That's when I started borrowing the four-track and having a go. I got really obsessed with it, more than art, film or anything. I became an information junkie. I'd go for days without brushing teeth, feeling like I'm learning so much, getting up at 8 in the morning and on the four-track all day. Lost all my friends, wouldn't comb my hair for days, just stick on my sweatshirt and have a go.

THE DIASPORA STRIKES BACK

If you're truly trying to make a social statement, why not devote an entire song to the struggles you only touch upon?

I think I come from the post-MTV generation. Personally I couldn't really sit through a whole song about one particular thing. My train of thought doesn't work like that. I'm not that thorough, and that's not what I want to do. Have you heard I-Wayne, the Jamaican reggae singer? I think he's going to be huge as a Bob Dylan/Bob Marley character. His cultural commentary is amazing, how he's part of the world, what he thinks about it. When I listen to him, I think, 'I can't really be like that, cause it's not my thing.' He talks about things I believe, but I can't really say those things, because I tend to understand where many different people's points of view are coming from. I'd rather try to understand people no matter what they're into and what they do, than to have an opinion and devoting a whole song to it. I want it both ways. I'm political and I'm pop and I'm this and I'm that, because my entire Western cultural identity is totally made up from what I've come across. So when I go into a particular direction, come across things and internalize things, they all make up who I am. They all go into my work. I can't really be streamline my thought. The only thing I could do is be whoever I've become, have the strength to stick to it and portray it. And if who I am is confused and the portrayals are all about having or not having an identity because of where I come from, that's kind of an all right state to reflect in my work.

Talk a little about cribbing your

beats and influences from a lot of global subcultures on *Arular*.

The way I see it is that none of my mates has one thing they listen to. You wake up to the radio, you hear this music; you get in a cab, you listen to that music; you go to the Chinese takeaway, you hear something else; go to the dentist and you listen to a different type of thing. You get exposed to lots of different cultures of music, which is what I was responding to. The beats I caught on the record are about what's going on here, there and everywhere, at this point in time. It's criss-crossing information to different sets of people around the world, cause I knew that I was somebody who was going to travel around, that I didn't have a drummer [or] a culture that I belonged to. If that meant anybody was going to listen to it, it was a good opportunity to [introduce] anyone to all the things that are going on [around the world], the things not on mainstream radio or on MTV.

But since they're mostly derived from localized scenes of shantytowns and ghettos from around the globe, you're conscious of how it adds up to a projection of you as, like, a Third World Madonna, a champion or a user of those scenes, right?

I guess—as I said, no one's come up yet. What [the industry] usually does is not let you be yourself. And that's really going to be my fight, my struggle, to stay me. I was that kid on the telly when people were watching Sri Lanka on the news. For 10 years I lived like that, and I'm totally proud of it. I'm not about taking sides. I'm simply representing the refugee, a faceless thing, and I will always speak to that. They'll never be able to take that away from me. *Arular* is about that, and my mentality is like that. I'm not going to change my mentality now. Those are the roots, and I don't think they'll ever beat that out of me. My point is: people are investing millions of [dollars] in ammunition to bomb other people around the world, [and as long as they are] there will always be someone coming up from those places talking about it, because we've got the right. If they don't fill my head up with those images, then I won't be talking about it, and if they don't like it, they should stop first. But I'm also proud of what I learned in England too, the vast amount of information and opportunity and education. I use those things to apply what I want to say. The rest is figuring out which stories I can and want to tell—and not turning into Britney. But we'll see. You are gonna have to watch this space to see how it evolves.

Ⓢ

NOTES ABOUT OUR CONTRIBUTORS

Ian Christe is the author of *Sound of the Beast: The Complete Headbanging History of Heavy Metal* (HarperCollins), available wherever books are sold.

Byron Coley lives in Massachusetts. He wrote the liner notes for Merge's recent *Dinosaur Jr.* reissues, contributes regularly to *The Wire* and is part of the Ecstatic Yod Collective, which, along with Glass Eye Books has a storefront located in western Massachusetts, offering "avant garde flotsam in all of the popular archaic formats." www.yod.com

Erik Davis is the author of *Techgnosis: Myth, Magic, and Mysticism in the Age of Information*, recently reissued by Serpents Tail. His short book on the fourth Led Zeppelin record, part of Continuum's 33.3 series, has just been published. A fifth-generation Californian, he lives in San Francisco with his wife. www.techgnosis.com

Vanessa Davis is one of those up-and-comers you hear about.

Jeff Johnson is a writer, presumably, located in New York. fittedsweats.blogspot.com

Ben Katchor is the Sidney Harmon Writer-in-Residence at Baruch College, New York City for the spring 2005 term. He teaches a course on picture-story writing and currently has an exhibition of drawings at the college's Mishkin Gallery. www.katchor.com

Stacy Kranitz is a documentary photographer. She is currently in Louisiana working on a story about the last remaining legal cockfighting pits in the United States. www.stacykranitz.com

David Lasky is slowly amassing thousands of pages of his comics for his collection, *Encyclopedia Lasky*.

Jason Miles is working some stuff out.

Thurston Moore started Sonic Youth in 1980 after overcoming five years of Lou Reed/Bryan Ferry fixation therapy. He now lives in Northampton,

Massachusetts where he runs the record label Ecstatic Peace and works part time as counter dude at Sweeties.

Sam Ott is a writer and photographer whose work has appeared in the *OC Weekly* and the literary journal *Suspect Thoughts*. She lives in Los Angeles, where she is the she in She-Rat. Contact: samjeanott@yahoo.com

John Payne is an L.A.-based writer and composer. He is a frequent contributor to *L.A. Weekly*, where he is the former music editor. He likes loud and soft progressive music of any kind.

Claudio Parentela has a whole lot to say. That's presumably

because he's done many things in many ways. c.parentela@libero.it

Eric Planet de Jesus is into tractor beams and he draws and draws and draws. www.easysubculture.8m.com

Daniel Pinchbeck is the author of *Breaking Open the Head: A Psychedelic Journey Into the Heart of Contemporary Shamanism* (Broadway Books). He is currently working on a second book for Broadway, about prophecies and consciousness transformation. www.breakingopenthehead.com

Creator of the comic book character "Devil Chef," **Jack Pollock** recently provided illustrations for Barbara Rushkoff's *Jewish Holiday Fun for You*. He

lives somewhere the hell in New York State with his psych professor wife and super-intelligent dog.

Michael Rauner is an independent photographer, book-maker and installation artist based in San Francisco. He has shown his artwork in museums and galleries nationally, including exhibitions at Denver's Museum of Contemporary Art, and The Woodstock Center of Photography in New York. His photography will be included in the upcoming City Lights Books publication *San Francisco: The Political Edge*.

Although his creative output often branches out into three dimensions (be it toy design, performance, or sound), **Ron Regé, Jr.**'s work always begins as a series

of scribbles. "Peace Comics" is his second drawn collaboration with Becky Stark. The first, *An Introduction to the Mystical Union of Souls* exists as a cartoon booklet and 3-inch cd, available at buenaventurapress.com. Bound volumes of his drawings are due this year from Buenaventura Press, Drawn & Quarterly, and Coconino press in Italy and France.

Arik Moonhawk Roper is an illustrator/designer from New York City who specializes in phantasmagorical images for various uncanny clients. www.arikroper.com

Eddie Ruscha is a man who clouds the borders of infinity. zotborg2000@earthlink.net

Douglas Rushkoff is the author of ten books, including *Media Virus*, *Nothing Sacred*, *Ecstasy Club* and *Club ZeroG*. He makes documentaries for PBS Frontline, runs the Narrative Lab at NYU's Interactive Telecommunications Program, and plays keyboards with Psychic TV. www.rushkoff.com

Becky Stark is the founder of Comedians for World Peace, a group that advocates for the proliferation of comedy. Her work as Lavender Diamond includes the operetta *Birdsongs of the Bauharoque* (a collaboration with Xander Marro), the album *Artifacts of the Winged*, and an upcoming album by the new Lavender Diamond Band (with Ron Regé, Jr., Jeff Rosenberg and Steve Gregoropoulos). She is also a founding member of the Mystical Unionists.

Becca Taylor draws a mini-comic called *The Wonderful Year*. www.sharptonguedshrew.com

Peter Lamborn Wilson's latest works include *Avant Gardening: Ecological Struggle in City and World* (ed., with Bill Weinberg, Autonomedia); *Drunken Universe: An Anthology of Persian Sufi Poetry* (with N. Pourjavady, Omega Press); and *Atlantis Manifesto* (poetry) (Shivastan Press, Kathmandu).

Chris Wright is currently working on a graphic novel about pirates while refining his cross-hatching.



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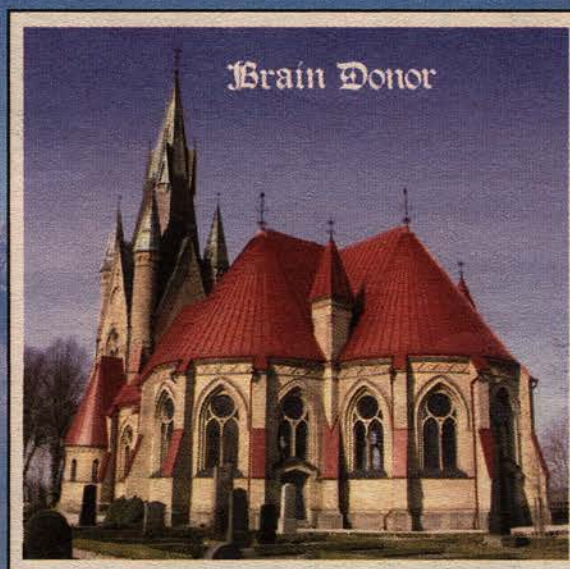
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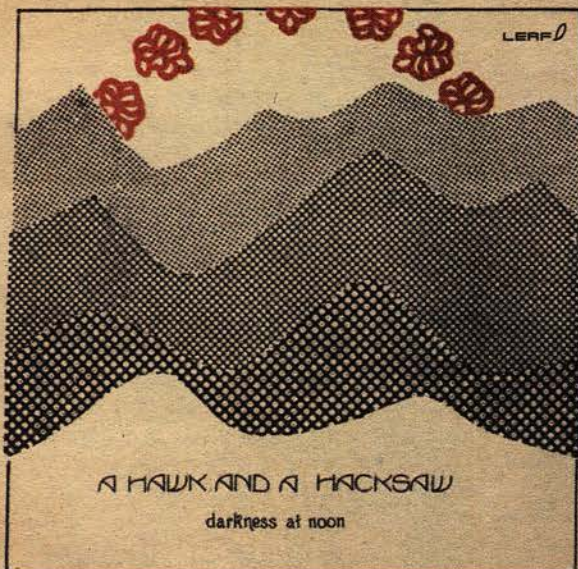
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Meet Laura.

Laura is a 25-year-old DJ from Denmark. When she moved to New York and discovered that people listen to rock and not house, she became a hairstylist. She is looking to get sponsored for her visa.

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